

# **GRIEVING WOMEN IN *HAMLET* AND *THE TRAGEDY OF MARIAM***

A Thesis

By

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## ABSTRACT

I explore how two early modern plays, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*, depict grief as feminized emotion. I consider how Shakespeare uses women as mediums for grief and how Cary gives female characters power through their subversive emotional expression. First, I contextualize my two case studies by providing historical information about grief in its various forms, including contemporary medical theories, philosophical views, religious tracts, and cultural perspectives.

I expand current scholarship by focusing on how women are feminized through their emotions and how those emotions enable transgressive behavior, impacting what early modern grief is and does. By engaging six powerful female characters across two early modern tragedies, I challenge scholars who argue that early moderns had a strictly scientific evaluation of emotion. By exposing the various forces at work in early modern grief, I contend that grief emboldens women in subversive ways that distinguish them from men and empowers them through expression.

I then focus on Hamlet's feminized insults towards women as evidence of his own repressed grief regarding his father's death. Finally, I shift emphasis from women as prototypes for male grief and look at the emotional capabilities of two female characters, Mariam and her mother Alexandra, who demonstrate emotional agency in *The Tragedy of Mariam*. By centering my research on grief, an emotion that was most commonly restricted to women, I contribute to this significant research area by arguing that women actively proscribed the early modern notions of grief, even as they were limited to this allowed outlet. Paradoxically, women redefined grief prescribed to them by men as an active, empowering emotion. Male characters

look to women as authorities on grief and view women as mediums for *their* grief; however, women often embody grief to transgress cultural norms. Ultimately, I cast grief not as a passive emotion, but a strongly active response to tragedy, exposing women's often overlooked, hidden power on the early modern stage and in the pages of closet drama.

## **DEDICATION**

To my mother,  
who has always believed in me

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND INTERSECTIONALITY OF EMOTIONS: AUTHENTIC GRIEF THROUGH PERFORMANCE

Michel de Montaigne, a prominent philosopher during Shakespeare's period, explored the concept of emotions with an irony that makes his work, *Essais*, an excellent introduction to the incongruous early modern passions. In "How We Cry and Laugh for the Same Thing," Montaigne focuses on the "inconstancy" of our passions, including their conflicting and transitory natures (Montaigne 173). According to Montaigne and the philosophical tradition before him, the passions' "inconstancy" is not to be trusted and threatens the peaceful, retiring life characteristic of philosophers (173). Yet, in the emotional realm of early modern tragedy, "the sheer diversity of the passions" is fanned into flame by playwrights like Elizabeth Cary and Shakespeare whose plays thrived on dramatic tension (Schmitter 11). Two of their plays, *The Tragedy of Mariam* and *Hamlet*, will serve as case studies for how women specifically used grief to rebel covertly against the emotional cultural tableaux of their time, empowering them above that of their male tragic counterparts.

For Montaigne, he embraced the complicated nature of the passions and philosophized that "we are wrong to compose a continuous body out of all this succession of feelings" ("How We Cry and Laugh for the Same Thing" 174). In this statement, Montaigne rejects the popular idea of a whole and complete body, viewing emotional expression as disjointed pieces of the self that cannot be confined or proscribed (though this did not dissuade many early moderns from trying to define them). In the very first scene of *Hamlet*, we see this early modern fragmented view of self when Barnardo inquires of the night: "Say, what, is Horatio there?" and Horatio replies "A piece of him" (1.1.18-19 *fn*). In Denmark, time is not the only thing "out of joint," but



also emotive bodies (1.5.186). In the plays examined here, I argue that women embody Montaigne's contradictory "succession of feelings" to find healing from loss through expression, discovering feminized, emotional agency in the process. And in this reactionary, yet active performance of grieving, women accrue empowerment and wholeness, "as [their] outward expression shapes inward affect" (Montaigne 635) (Schmitter 11). For men (as Horatio's comment and early modern views attest), there exists a divided wall between them and the external world, but women are not granted this due to the vulnerability of their sexed bodies. As will become evident, early modern women choose to embrace this bodily exposure to grief, discovering a type of agency.

More generally, emotion comes in many names—*passio*, affectation, disturbance, imbalance in humours, and spiritual communication. In the context of early modern drama, I discuss this emotional desire for expression as "performing grief," which rejects the notion of pure interiority. The co-creative relationship between external performance and internal feeling intensifies with actors on an actual stage, spotlighting the deep complexities involved in emotions and the strong early modern cultural tendency to judge the inward for the outward.

In this chapter, I react to Bridget Escolme's and Michael Schoenfeldt's scholarship on cultural meanings of emotions and how emotions have come to mean different things in different times. Instead, I argue that there exists a socio-cultural consistency across time. When we take into consideration the various ideologies influencing the early modern views of emotion, we see how emotions themselves have not changed quite so much as previously argued from the neat and organized taxonomies of Aristotle and Cicero, only the ways in which we internalize, categorize, and express them. In this section, I concentrate on how early moderns sought to explain grief, its internal activity, its external expression, and women's relationship to it.

Intriguing questions emerge when one pinpoints the cross-gendering of medical, religious, philosophical, and cultural ideas about emotion and women. The list of questions includes: Is grief gendered? Which sex is better at expressing this passion? Is this passion active or passive? Is it positive or negative? Is it physical, spiritual, cognitive, or all three? Why do early modern men seem to stumble over emotion (like Shakespeare's Hamlet and Cary's Herod) while early modern women seem so good at it (Cary's Mariam or Shakespeare's Niobe and Hecuba)? And why is the early modern stage (specifically tragedy) bursting with emotional, grieving men when the actual culture suppressed that kind of male expression?

I approach the emotions with an informed understanding contextualized in Renaissance culture by considering four different views. My overview serves as an introduction rather than as an all-encompassing explanation of the complexities and varieties within each view. The various frameworks include: a medical view (a view that was much more influenced by other views than medical views are today), a religious view (which was experiencing its own tumultuous upheaval in the wake of the Reformation and iconoclasm), a philosophical view (a view that depended as much on ancient pagan ideas as it did on the previous two views), and a cultural and dramatic view (perspectives that materialized from the previously mentioned ideologies yet converted them to more livable, simplified ideas). While these views flow into and out of each other (as the blood does in the heart in the early modern and modern body), I will address them each individually as well as pinpointing the ways ideas "interplayed" to define, proscribe, limit, restrict, and assign women's bodies as prime "objects" and "instruments" for emotion—especially grief (Wolfe).

## **Physical Emotion: Humoural Movements of the Early Modern Body**

Olivia Weisser and others observe the “obvious contradictions” in early modern understandings of the female body, emotions, mind, spirit, and soul (261). This logical tension may grant women a secret power, a power emanating from a double-standard that women capitalize on at times but are also victimized by in others. Here, I consider broad ideas about emotions and the body that apply to both sexes, concluding with a more female-focused consideration of the medical view. A “scientific” understanding of the early modern body deeply shapes how Cary and Shakespeare design their grieving characters and their feminization of grief.

Medical, philosophical, religious, and cultural/dramatic views of emotion all begin (and some end) with the physical body. During the Renaissance as now, emotions were commonly associated with the body, the corporal, carnal part of what makes humans human. Early moderns had a fascinating medical framework to explain bodies and emotion in exclusively biological terms, with its roots in the ancient works of Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen. A medical view of the body that was commonly accepted and believed during the sixteenth century is called “humourism” or “Galenism,” a medical philosophy claiming that a physical bodily occurrence directly causes an emotional feeling in people and animals. According to medical doctors, these bodily actions depended on an internal harmony, involving four distinct “humours,” also called spirits, or vapours (Peacham).

These humours and their corresponding emotional states are as follows: black bile (melancholic), phlegm (phlegmatic), yellow bile (choleric), and blood (sanguine). While the terms “spirits” or “vapours” connote the metaphysical, medical experts espoused that these were actual physical occurrences in the body, giving each humour important bodily characteristics and locations. For instance, black bile was cold and dry and located in the spleen, phlegm was cold

and moist and located in the brain, yellow bile was hot and dry and located in the gallbladder, and blood was hot and moist and located in the heart (Peacham). The humors' temperatures and textures are gendered, used to classify and proscribe women's bodies: males were hot blooded and dry, while females were cold and wet (Bright). However, according to medical experts, increased blood flow created copious amounts of heat. Women's menstrual cycles and stereotypical amorous, flirty temperaments placed them as more hot-blooded (that is, sanguine) beings than men. The ironies and contradictions involving women within humourism are abundant, such as the "cold and wet" characterization of their bodies in light of their menstrual connection to blood and heat. Regardless of sex, humours were interdependent and worked together, creating harmony and health within the body. When they were kept under control and in their proper order, harmonious humours evoked emotions such as joy and cheerfulness, and in their most perfect state of accord, led to a Stoical indifference to external events (Montaigne *Essais*).

However, major problems arose, like anger, grief, or a more serious illness, when humours slid out of balance or one humour dominated the others. Early moderns, from medical doctors to philosophers, loved the idea of "everything in moderation"—Aquinas even mockingly argued that the pursuit of happiness should be in moderation (Schmitter 8). Consequently, the opposite of emotional moderation is passionate chaos—an ingredient never wanting in an early modern tragedy! Another dramatic genre of the period took a more direct route in characterizing the humours, called the "comedy of the Humours." These plays were satirical in nature with characters who personified a certain humour, made popular by George Chapman's *An Humorous Day's Mirth* (1597) and *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596). Also, "the fad of the humours comedy" was evident in Ben Jonson's *The Case Is Altered* (1597) and *Every Man In His Humour*

(1598). In his introduction to Jonson's latter play, David Bevington observes that "the idea of humours comedy, and indeed the word 'humour' itself, were rapidly becoming the rage" (*Cambridge Online*). One could argue that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* matches this genre as well, with the tragic hero so obviously referencing the symptoms and language of a melancholic person (O'Sullivan 667) (*Cambridge Online*).

Like melancholy, each emotional extreme has a corresponding humour that is at fault. Overindulgent melancholy comes from an excess of black bile in the spleen. Excessive anger derives from too much yellow bile in the liver. Inappropriate apathy originates from wasteful amounts of phlegm in the liver. Lust or an amorous disposition (sanguine temperament) stems from a gush of blood to the heart (Peacham). These maladies deserve attention because of their complexity and impact on the socio-cultural makeup of early moderns and their drama; however, I concentrate primarily on the "melancholicke" illness (Bright 263). Focusing on a medical view of melancholy, the most appropriate source to explicate is a medical treatise that was exceptionally popular during Shakespeare's and Cary's period: Timothie Bright's *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586). Indeed, scholars contend that Shakespeare himself most likely read Bright (O'Sullivan 667).

In his famous work that was printed in three different editions over the course of twenty-seven years (twice in 1586 and once in 1614), Bright emphasizes the idea of purity as well as harmony in the human body when discussing melancholy's plagues (O'Sullivan 667). When someone is a "melancholicke," their pure harmonious spirits are "mixed or defiled, by any straunge spirit or vapor" (Bright 97). Note here the lack of cognitive influence that causes melancholy. Bright defines a "melancholicke" as a person suffering from an internal elemental reaction out of her control (97). Thus, excessive grief is defilement from an alien, foreign spirit

or vapor. Bright does not seem to go into much depth about where these “straunge” spirits come from that defile the melancholic person (97). In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare echoes Bright’s rhetoric on how melancholy works with his characterization of Hamlet’s grief. Here, Bright explains the humoral activities at work in a melancholic person:

The perturbations of melancholy are for the most parte, sadde and fearefull, and such as rise of them: as distrust, doubt, diffidence, or dispaire, sometimes furious, and sometimes merry in apparaunce, through a kind of Sardonian, and false laughther, as the humour, is disposed that procureth these diuersities...[The melancholy humor] with his vapours anoyeth the harte and passing vp to the brayne, counterfetteth terrible obiectes to the fantasie, and polluting both the substance, and spirits of the brayne, causeth it without externall occasion, to forge monstrous fictions, and terrible to the conceite...For where that natural and internall light is darkened, their fansies arise vayne, false, an voide of ground. (102)

First, Bright emphasizes the “diuersities” of melancholy, including sadness, fear, distrust, doubt, diffidence, or “dispaire, sometimes furious, and sometimes merry in apparaunce” (102).

This emotional diversity within one humoral disruption describes Hamlet to a tee, who is plagued by that dark “false laughter” (102). The most important wording of this passage is the penultimate sentence quoted above that begins with melancholy as the actor of the statement:

“*Melancholy* with his vapors annoys the heart and then passes up to the brain” (102). The sentence’s subject or actor is melancholy with his vapors, *not* the melancholic person. The progression is fascinating in that melancholy is personified, given complete power over the person. Melancholy first annoys or exacerbates the heart first. The plague then evaporates upwards to the brain and distorts Reason or “conceit” so much that the mind cannot rightly discern the external world due to “monstrous fictions” and “fantasies” (a terrible fate for an early modern person who put an exaggerated amount of meaning on the appearance of things) (Bright 102).

So, why do melancholy's vaporous spirits annoy the heart, then the mind? This sequential process may very well originate from biblical explanations, demonstrating the cross-gendering of ideologies prevalent in ideas about emotions. For instance, from the Old Testament to the New Testament (Deuteronomy to the Gospels), there existed an order for experiencing emotion: "Love the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Deuteronomy 6:5). Thanks to the Reformation and explosion of print, the Geneva Bible was widely read and owned (Shakespeare may have even owned a copy), providing the basis for thought in many arenas of knowledge. Bright's passive rhetoric provided power to the humour itself and not the person experiencing excessive grief, greatly affecting how characters, both male and female, tried to express grief passively and with an emphasis on the heart.

Additionally, the last sentence of Bright's passage demonstrates the interplay of ideas during this period: "For where that natural and internall light is darkened, their fansies arise vayne, false, an voide of ground" (102). The medical view here steals from a spiritual source again to explain a purely physical activity: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23). The language of lightness and darkness is rooted in Scripture with the mind and the mind's eye as the "light" or "lamp" of the body. Bright plays on this expression to show the severe damage of melancholy to a person. In this case, the idea is that humans were made in God's image and are "light" in their ability to perceive the world, yet the humoral disruption of that ability distorts our humanness.

In this same vein, early moderns believed emotions made you *less* human, whereas twenty-first century individuals view our passions as a part of our unique identities (Escolme).

Bright emphasizes melancholy as dehumanizing to his early modern reader when he uses artful metaphors involving the lute and the pen: “but such a disposition, and such discontentment, as a false stringed lute, giueth to the Musician: or a rough and euill fashioned pen, to the cunning writer: which only obscureth, the shew of either art” (38). First, Bright assumes an appropriate form of grief, which would serve as the *right* “stringed lute.” However, if melancholy (grief in its extreme state) is given to the person falsely stringed, how does the lute become falsely strung? Based on early modern ideas, it is not a great leap to think that the six “nonnaturals” are to blame for the disturbed lute as well as the “euill fashioned pen:” “The six nonnaturals determined humoral shifts: air, exercise, sleep, diet, evacuation/repletion, and emotions” (Weisser 252). In this way, natural internal humours are disturbed by the unnatural environment outside of the body. Bright’s metaphors show the melancholic person’s passivity, granting the most agency to the emotional affliction itself as well as to the external environment. Based on the sentence structure and metaphors throughout, Bright shows us that a person is a victim of emotions and their environment and that emotions are purely physical. This concept appears to reject my thesis that grief for women is empowering, but the passivity of humoral emotion is not the only idea to be gleaned from this ideology.

Now that the humoral understanding of the body and emotions has been introduced, let us turn to the ramifications of these ideas on early modern women. Weisser explains that “In early modern England, women’s bodies were thought to be physically wetter and colder than men’s, a composition that enabled reproduction but also made women more susceptible to the power of emotions” (261). She then goes on to connect women’s perceived bodily makeup to their emotional vulnerability, particularly grief: “Women’s flesh was loose, soft, and porous, thereby allowing emotions to impress upon women’s bodies more easily. Such spongy, open



bodies required a continual emission of fluids by means of lactation and menstruation, as well as tears” (261). The notion that nonnaturals were to blame for humoral imbalances explains why women’s openness, sponginess, and wetness made them more prone to external catalysts. The proximity between lactation, menstruation, and tears places tears within the company of highly sexual and feminized secretions. In this way, it seems that crying evokes a female leakiness. Weisser contends that “Women’s leaky bodies offered a natural explanation for their sex’s vulnerability to emotions while simultaneously confirming the belief that women were innately inferior to men. The more desirable and allegedly perfect bodies of men were hot and dry, which made men physically compact and resistant to emotions” (261). Bright also describes men’s resistance to emotion, observing that they “hardly yeeld forth that signe of sorrow though the occasion may require it” (101). It makes sense that early modern men resisted “that signe of sorrow” due to its almost sexual association with female fluids. Importantly, these sources do not say that men did not feel emotion, but that they produced no “signe” of emotion, suppressing the expression of it rather than the internal reality of it. This distinction will become key in our discussion of *Hamlet* in the next chapter. Ultimately, the medical view feminizes grief and then creates rules and boundaries for grief according to each sex: the woman is enabled to express grief due to her bodily weakness and the man is to restrain expression in order to retain his masculinity. In *Hamlet* and *The Tragedy of Mariam*, male and female characters interact in strange, envious, and counterintuitive ways about grief—ways derived from the humoral ideology.

Additionally, these medical understandings of both sexed bodies relate to how early modern individuals culturally and personally lived out their emotional responses to events. Women were firmly believed to have superior emotional capacities to men, yet Weisser makes

sure to point out that this was proof of their inferiority to men during the period. I seek to challenge this claim by showing the empowerment that comes from women who wield their wetness and leakiness (that is, their humoral emotionality) to their own advancement, a power that early modern men seem to secretly envy and wish to emulate.

### **Philosophical Emotion: “Soul states”**

Bright argues that melancholy is an internal, obscuring, and fantasy-driven imbalance of the body that afflicts someone, but grief can also take on other forms. For sixteenth-century philosophy, grief was not confined to the body but spilled over into the cognitive realm of our being and our spiritual selves. I will center our philosophical discussion on the Stoic philosophers whose ideas on emotion shaped Renaissance philosophy and culture.

In particular, philosophical frameworks from Aristotle to Montaigne create an interesting dichotomy between spirit and body, between the body’s uncontrollable activities and the mind’s ability to govern them. The Stoics believed that harmony and order are the natural state of our bodies, that everything in its “natural” state should act in accordance with something else. Yet, as we have seen in humourism, external events can disrupt this perfect state, the *euphoria*, *apatheia*, or *tranquillitas* as Cicero calls it (Schmitter 4). This philosophical ideal of perfect order, apathy, and tranquility existed within the macrocosm-microcosm perspective of the universe (Bevington *Cambridge Online*). In the sixteenth century, the early modern body made up its own little world, evident in the early modern tendency to transfer the idea of governing a nation to “self-government” as a synonym for personal self-control, proposed by the philosopher Lipsius. Everything that occurred within the early modern body had a corresponding parallel in the universe at large. Grief demonstrates this philosophy about the person as a mini-world by rain representing tears and storms feminized as personifications of women, continuing into our

present day by the pre-nineteenth-century habit of naming storms after women. Arguably, the uncontrollable nature of storms reveals early modern male anxiety about female wetness and unpredictable grief.

Continuing the idea of a person as a mini-universe, Bevington abbreviates the philosophical idea by focusing on the four elements:

In theory, at least, ‘humours’ was understood as originally medical in concept, going back at least to Galen (c. AD 129–199) and his classification of all matter into the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire. These elements in turn were thought to be the product of various combinations of the four ‘qualities’ of the universe: hot, cold, moist, and dry. The earth was cold and dry; water, cold and moist; air, hot and moist; fire, hot and dry. Air and fire were the aspiring elements, tending upwards; earth and water were the baser elements, confined to the world in which we live. Because all human beings are microcosms of the larger universe, humans contain within themselves the four elements. As in the universe, those elements are, potentially at least, at war. (*Cambridge Online*)

Bevington goes on to talk about how early moderns believed that, while everyone had the four elements within them, a person often had one humour in excess. As mentioned previously, women’s bodies were labeled “cold and moist” more so than men’s bodies, which were “hot and dry.” Subsequently, women were not aligned with the “aspiring elements, tending upwards,” like men were. Instead, women were coupled with the “baser elements” of earth and water. Even in the microcosmic view that joins humourism with philosophy, women were demoted to men and associated with the earthly instead of the heavenly. And again, women’s wetness and close connection to water is to blame, but these ideologies condescending to women are complicated and, at times, even reversed when viewed with the entire ideological framework in mind, including religious and cultural perspectives.

Another early modern philosophical staple disdains women beyond bodily makeup and includes the universe on a much larger scale. For the Renaissance universe, there existed a strict hierarchal order that originates from the “Great Chain of Being” and Neoplatonism, “a meta-

discourse and reflection on the sum-total of ideas produced over centuries of sustained inquiry into the human condition” (*Stanford Encyclopedia*). For instance, Neoplatonism espouses “constancy” within the Great Chain of Being, in which no one (rock, plant, bird, woman, or angel) could ascend or descend. It is a highly politicized view that entrapped people within their social station, their sex, and their position on the hierarchal chain. Therefore, according to early moderns, I attempt the impossible—to reveal the vertical struggle upwards on the Chain of Being that early modern women experienced through their emotions. While they do not wish to shuffle off their sexed bodies and become men, they do struggle for autonomy and equality with men through expression and performance. For both men and women on this ladder, they were straddling two worlds of spirit and earth, situated below the angels but above the animals—women slightly closer to animals than men, of course. The emotions, depending on whether they are appropriate or in excess, create tensions and changes along this rigid line, drawing humans heavenward at one moment and plummeting towards the dust in another. This may seem like a cursory and simplified view of philosophical ideas, but meditating on the *macro* will greatly influence our perspective on the *micro* of emotions.

Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca provide foundational ideas about emotions that widely influenced sixteenth-century philosophy. For Aristotle, emotions were “a fixture of human life” (Schmitter 3). Due to the inevitability of the passions, he treated them moderately and conservatively, arguing that there existed right emotions “in accord with the dictates of right reason” (Schmitter 3). His mentality was that if emotions are unavoidable, then they must be a part of the virtuous and happy life in some form. However, Stoics were “intolerant of the *pathe*” and did not share his moderate approach to them (Schmitter 3). Two Stoics, Cicero and Seneca, “transmitted to early modern philosophers” this intolerance of emotion and reverence for apathy

known as Stoicism (Schmitter 3). Similar to their forefather Aristotle, these two Stoics placed *pathe* “within the passive, material element of the universe” (Schmitter 3). Due to this animalistic and corporal quality, emotions drew humans downward on the Neoplatonic ladder rather than upwards towards heaven.

Cicero confirms the Stoic’s negative connotation of emotions through his translation of the hyper-negative Greek word for emotion:

I might have rendered this literally, styled them ‘diseases,’ but the word ‘disease’ would not suit all instances; for example, no one speaks of pity, nor yet anger, as a disease, though the Greeks term these *pathos*. Let us then accept the word ‘emotion’ [*perturbatio*] the very sound of which seems to denote something vicious and these emotions are not excited by any natural influence (*De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* 255).

The original word for emotion is *pathos*, meaning “disease,” a denotation present in the humoral view of emotion. For both humourists and Stoics, emotion is seen as an affliction, an uncontrollable bodily occurrence. Yet, Cicero modifies the intensity of “disease” by using the word *perturbatio* for emotion, which he acknowledges “seems to denote something vicious.” With his translation, Cicero emphasizes the disturbing aspect of emotions, empowering the word with a tangible reality through bodily experience. Bright’s phrase “annoy the heart” comes to mind here along with the image of dark vapors evaporating up towards the brain, perturbing the senses.

Stoics “borrowed greatly from the Cynics” and argued that we cannot control our passions because they are “responses to external events, outside of our control, and so antithetical to virtue and happiness” (which is a life firmly within our control and intrinsically good) (Schmitter 3). Therefore—here’s where the Cynicism comes in—we are all “thoroughly and equally vicious, although for reasons outside of our control” (Schmitter 4). Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Cynics all believed that emotions were unavoidable, but the Stoic’s conclusion

that this made us all “vicious...for reasons outside of our control” aligns well with the ideas of an influential theologian of the period, John Calvin, and his doctrine regarding Total Depravity (the “T” in his doctrinal acronym TULIP). The Christian idea that all human beings are depraved at birth due to the Fall in the Garden of Eden runs richly through early modern ideologies regarding emotion: the medical view that it is a disruption to the body originally made perfect and harmonious in God’s image, the philosophical view that emotion does not enhance individuality but suppresses it, and the cultural view that excessive emotion shows a lack of self-government rooted in humankind’s evil nature.

Throughout all the spheres of knowledge, an interdependency of ideas emerges, displayed on the early modern stage. For tragedy as a genre, it feeds on the presence of despair or extreme grief, delineated in the Christian world as a turning away from God’s righteousness. Here, the Stoic’s view is explained by a New Testament passage quoting an Old Testament Psalm:

As it is written:  
“There is no one righteous, not even one;  
there is no one who understands;  
there is no one who seeks God.  
*All have turned away,*  
they have together become worthless;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one.” (Romans 3:10-12 quoting Psalm 14:1-3)

Contrary to this influential Christian belief, Stoics believed that “A genuine sage...would achieve a state of *apatheia*, or what Cicero calls *tranquillitas*, the absence of alien *pathe*” through a superior capacity for self-control (Schmitter 4). Rather than God’s grace helping these sages reach their heaven-like emotionless state as Christians argue, Stoic sages’ own self-sufficiency propelled them there. According to Stoics, there exists a strange dichotomy between

emotions as unavoidable realities and the goal to control them through apathy, indifference, and self-governing.

In light of this dichotomy, Stoics viewed the passions through multiple and sometimes contradictory lenses: “For the Stoics did not simply see the passions as brute reactions to external events, but as cognitive responses, judgments about the nature and value of various (present or future) states of affairs” (Schmitter 4). Here, it becomes clear that Stoics like Cicero and Seneca saw emotions as actions occurring in the mind as well, specifically judgments or assessments of external events. Yet, these judgments in the mind are usually *false* discernments and cannot be trusted, echoing the famous Biblical passage: “The heart is deceitful above all things, who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). In both Stoic philosophy and Scripture, emotions as physical and mental experiences were deceitful and should not be trusted, further coloring the hue of women’s grief as subversive and rebellious.

Sixteenth-century philosophy, influenced by the Stoics, has informed us that emotions are bodily, uncontrollable, unavoidable, cognitive judgments, and governable in a superior mind—but the soul cannot be ignored here. Stoics believed that “emotions are not solely cognitive; they are soul states...the soul was itself a particular tensioning of the material *pneuma*, part of the ‘breath,’ or ‘wind’ that ran through and gave form to everything in the world” (Schmitter 5). *Pneuma* as an ephemeral spirit intersects with Christianity, pointing to Christianity’s Holy Spirit, one of the most mysterious members of the Trinity: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). The idea of the soul as “tensioning” resonates deeply in this current discussion of *perturbatio*, where the physical body’s harmony tenses when emotions wreak havoc. Early modern emotions cannot be properly discussed (though scholars have

attempted to do so) without addressing and incorporating Christianity's influence on the topic. Such viewpoints, as with them all, complicate women's agency at times but also simultaneously breathe life into their potential for emotive power, which is why the next section deals primarily with this spiritual sphere of knowledge.

### **Spiritual Grief: Palimpsestuous Grieving Bodies**

In the wake of Henry VIII's and Elizabeth I's reforms as well as iconoclasm's carnage, women suffered more than men as they were forced to renegotiate their faith and identity in a world that punished them for being women (Chappell 1). Julie A. Chappell describes Henry VIII's reforms as having "bloodied the landscape without consideration for rank or gender" (2). Chappell intimates that female religious rebels were not immune to the persecution, stating: "Early in 1534, Henry VIII's regime silenced its first woman by hanging her when she would be silenced no other way" (2). Her name was "Elizabeth Barton, a young nun of low birth, [who] refused to stop prophesying the demise of Henry's kingship" (Chappell 2). And it did not stop there; female martyrs increased in number "as women's bodies became the contested space for religious change" (Chappell 2). While courageous women exerted a faith-based force powerful enough to be martyred for it, Chappell informs us that women were still "deemed suspect by the (mis) use of the qualities, the 'humours,' associated with women, an association that would be firmly entrenched during subsequent centuries of the aggressive masculinity of nation and empire building" (6). The bitter irony for devout early modern women was the fact that they were deemed equal for martyrdom but inferior in life.

Not only martyrdom, but iconoclasm was a controversial series of events in which zealous Puritans in the English government destroyed Catholic religious images and writings as heretical (*OED*). Similar to this destruction of Catholic extravagance and beauty, women's



affective faith founded as far back as medieval mysticism was threatened due to its intense spiritual and emotional passion. There is much for which to praise the Reformation in the opportunities given to women through the proliferation of Scripture and dissemination of personal authority over one's spiritual knowledge, yet scholars have noted the movement's tendency to defame the Virgin and cast women as a scapegoat for "carnality," associating them primarily with the physical sanguine temperament (Chappell 6). Helen Hackett sums up the early modern culture's "complex and self-contradictory view of women" by arguing that it alternated "between celebrating their nobility of character and vilifying them for embodying sexual temptation" (164). Thus, both Christian and cultural views of women's bodies—seemingly sanctioned by Scripture—argue that the body is evil and should be shunned, and that the female body was a shade darker than the male's due to her body being a tempting object for the man. Akin to the beautiful art found in Catholic churches, the attractive form of a woman's body (especially when empowered through passion for God) frightened the Reformed Puritans who wanted to see only God as both beautiful *and* powerful. When we step into the dusty playhouses of the Globe or onto the pages of Cary's closet drama, however, we see two playwrights, Shakespeare and Cary, challenging these humoral-based limitations and restrictions to women's emotional and spiritual empowerment through performance.

However, rivaling the early modern stage, the religious realm, explained by Frederick Bauerschmidt as the "realm of bodiliness," may be the most empowering place for female mourners (190). The Geneva Bible abounds with female prototypes for grief: Tamar mourning her incestuous rape, Rahab thoughtfully grieving the injustice done to her by the males around her, Naomi devastated by the death of her sons, and Mary the mother of Christ and Mary Magdalene mourning the Crucifixion of Jesus. From Sarah's grief over her infertility in the Old

Testament to the prostitute who weeps at Jesus's feet and wipes them away with her hair, women and grief are almost inseparable in the Bible, drawing them closer to God and closer to healing (Genesis 16, Luke 7).

Historical, Biblical knowledge was echoed in poetry, drama, and all forms of writing during the Renaissance. Even in an early modern conduct manual, for example, *The English Gentleman* (1630), Richard Brathwaite seems to almost subconsciously intertwine verses in his advice on good manners: "For he that forgetteth to conforme or fashion his *Life* to his *Speech*, his *Speech* to his *Life*, is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glasse: for he beholdeth himselfe, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was" (83). Brathwaite is clearly referencing James 1:23-24: "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was" (*KJV*). Interestingly, a scholar commenting on this excerpt chooses not to mention the fact that it is a paraphrase of a New Testament Epistle, whether out of ignorance or indifference. The point illustrated here is that since Scripture had been progressively placed into the hands of the people as opposed to a priest, the words therein were interwoven into men and women's everyday vocabulary and writing. The Bible serving as the most well-known piece of literature in early modern culture substantiates religious women as powerful grieving bodies.

In the influential medieval period, female mystics, renowned and prolific Catholic nuns, coined for themselves a spirituality deeply rooted in their female bodies, passionate emotions, and intensified imaginations through fantastical visions. Scripture's unavailability at that time encouraged these creative Catholic women to read their own bodies as divinely sanctioned instruments for revelation. Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, and

Marguerite Porete are important fixtures in Catholic history, spanning wildly across a spectrum from piety to heresy. This archaic female propensity to grieve and experience God through the body manifests itself in early modern social ideas about women's grief and how early modern women viewed it personally. Alexandra Walsham expounds on the overlapping nature of the Reformation period, which also explains the overlay of how women grieved: "It is widely compared with a parchment and palimpsest, a porous surface upon which each generation inscribes its own values and preoccupations without ever being able to erase entirely those of the preceding one" (6). Similar to the porous quality of women's bodies, the idea of the religious fabric for women's lives as a palimpsest helps explain our collection of alternate histories in which women are both subverted and empowered in their grief.

From the medieval period onward, men continued to condemn the feminine body as evil. The author of *Ancrene Wisse*, "a guide for female recluses" written during the 14th century, verbalizes this struggle for Christian women: the anonymous author says "Though the flesh is our enemy, we are commanded to uphold it. We must cause it grief as it very often deserves, but not destroy it altogether, since however weak it is, it is so joined and so tightly fixed to our precious soul..." (191). Women's bodies were both their salvation and their grief, revealing the complex perspective women had of their own bodies. Ellen Ross explains that by the 14th century, Christ's humanity was what most Christians related to the most in their daily lives. Ross informs us that "growing numbers of theological texts pondered the nature and effects of Christ's crucifixion, in painting and sculpture, depictions of the suffering of Christ in agony replaced the majestic Christ of resurrection and judgment" (46). Likewise, Frederick Bauerschmidt elucidates, "Jesus' humanity is most significant...because it entails bodiliness and thus the ability to suffer pain. For affective piety, it is in the realm of bodiliness – and more precisely, in

the realm of Christ's body – that God's identification with our suffering humanity takes place and thus our redemption is wrought" (190). For medieval mystics in the fourteenth century to female martyrs in the sixteenth, the female body was definitely a "contested space for religious change," inspiring fear and awe, humanity and spirituality, empowerment and rejection (Chappell). Importantly, women in the spiritual realm are not only authorized to grieve as in the medical and philosophical realms, but women *employ* that grief for a purpose: to communicate with God. In the case studies of *Hamlet* and *The Tragedy of Mariam* that follow, female characters like Mariam and *Hamlet*'s Niobe exhibit a spiritual "bodiliness" in their grief that does not demean them, but enables them access to an otherwise inaccessible power.

### **Cultural Emotion: "Never weep for form's sake"**

We cannot perfectly replicate or appreciate all early modern women's lives as they experienced them (or claim that one interpretation applies to every woman living during the period), but we can, with the help of various social sources, recreate parts of the lives some of these women led. The medical view that women are physically more vulnerable to emotion, the philosophical view that women are lower on the Chain of Being, the Scriptural view that praises women's righteous grief, and the ill-informed male religious leaders who condemn the female body as a carnal temptation all intermingle to give birth to women's emotional everyday life. Looking at the confluence of medical, philosophical, Scriptural, and now cultural views, I argue that Shakespeare's and Cary's female characters take on much more subversive, powerful, and transformative roles through their grief than has been previously argued. Investigating early modern female patient narratives, social conduct manuals, and the discrepancy between outward show and interior reality, I discover the limitations and restrictions on women's social behavior that grief enables women to transcend.

Weisser analyzes personal journals and correspondences from early modern men and women to gain insight into the early modern correlation between grief and sickness. Within the early modern female patient narratives, many women emphasized the heart when explaining their emotion-induced illnesses, most likely stemming from the medical “heart-centered model” of the body and the emphasis of the heart in Scripture (253). For example, in 1642, Alice Thornton wrote about how “an emotional outburst intensified her case of smallpox, which she contracted from her brother... Thornton’s fear and shock upon seeing her brother’s altered appearance, perhaps compounded by fear of her own potentially similar fate, triggered a series of internal processes that worsened her condition:

the sight of him affter his recovery[,] beeing strooke with feare seeing him so sadly used and all over very read [i.e., red], I immediately fell very ill, and from that time grew worse till I grew so dangerously ill and inwardly sicke, that I was in much perill of my life, by theire not comeing well out but kept att my heart. (Thornton 33)

As touched upon in the medical section, it was commonly believed that emotions, such as joy and anger, opened the heart up and brought heat to the heart while fear and sadness closed the heart off and kept blood from the body, making it cold. The medical view, a view Alice performs here, makes the connection between the heart’s natural processes and the unnatural “emotions,” claiming that an emotional response could actually hinder the heart from doing its job of healing. This prevalent idea about the relationship between the body’s inner workings and external stimuli demonstrates “how the bodily effects of emotions presupposed notions of personhood open to social environments rather than demarcated by contained bodies” (Weisser 248). The fascinating trend emerging from Weisser’s case studies is that women viewed their bodies as hyper-vulnerable to events and people, and even hurtful words had the power to upset them physically. Women “were bound into social relations down to their innermost flesh” (Duden 145). Here a medieval bodiliness flourishes in sixteenth-century female relationships,

demonstrating how “overwhelming sorrow caused women to mirror the aches and pains of loved ones” (Weisser 265). Weisser goes on to call this “a common discourse for conveying sympathy” among women (Weisser 265). Consequently, based on women’s personal reflections of their grief, they had internalized their humoral association with wetness to create a shared mode of communication.

Our modern-day tendency to compartmentalize the body’s health, emotions, and actions did not exist during the sixteenth century. Instead, for early moderns, there existed a fluidity in the cultural practice of these ideologies, evidenced in the fact that many early modern women “focus on the deleterious effects of interpersonal relationships and describe instant physical reactions to social disturbances” (Weisser 269). While Thornton’s example is one where the woman is already sick, there are many correspondences in which bad news, a devastating loss, or slander against a woman’s reputation causes her to become instantaneously ill. Rather than using their bodies to become nearer to God like the female mystics did, these women employed their bodies to perform an emotional reaction (whether that emotional reaction was truly felt within or not).

Regardless of the external cause’s intensity or the emotion’s genuineness, female emotion was consistently performed through bodily illness. Another woman from Weisser’s study comments on the discrepancy between outward show and emotional internality. Anne Dormer retorted to her husband when “he reprimanded Dormer for her failure to show adequate concern [about his stomach illness]: ‘I did neuer weep for forms sake, being naturally too apt to it’ (260). Women’s pervasive habit of weeping for form’s sake made Dormer associate outward show with deception rather than true sadness. Weisser concludes from Dormer’s comment that “While a family member’s illness necessitated certain expressions of grief, such responses must also be

genuine” (260). Yet, as Dormer informs us, female responses to grief did not have to be genuine, especially in light of the limited demographic from which Weisser was able to glean correspondence letters. Most of the cases she analyzes are from privileged early modern women, women who were prone to theatrical “fits” and “vexations” over comparatively insignificant events—a far cry from Hecuba’s raw, poignant sorrow over her husband’s murder in *Hamlet*. The distinction between genuine grief and empty performance is obvious, but the distinction does not have to affect the power of feminine grief, since externality rules in early modern England. For instance, Claudius’s public expression of grief over old Hamlet’s death as “our whole kingdom / To be contracted in one brow of woe” articulates the authority and power of performance, the “wisest sorrow,” even when no inward feeling exists (1.2.4, 6).

Speaking of grief in performance, there are few things more cultural or external in this society than conversation, the ways in which women speak and express their emotion. While our modern separation of physicality and something as unphysical as civil conversation makes it hard to grasp, early moderns had no such distinction between the body and the everyday act of communicating. In the early modern dialogue *The Civile Conversation of M. Steeven Guazzo* (1574), Guazzo refers to daily conversing as the “eloquence of body” (1.132). During this period, bodily connotations of conversing oppressed women more than men. Katherine R. Larson talks at length in her book about how “conversation denoted an embodied and gendered act that held the capacity to negotiate, manipulate, and transform social relationships” (20). In his well-known *De civilitate morum puerilium* (1530), Erasmus, a Christian humanist, names civility “the external decorum of the body” and the result of “a well-ordered mind” (Larson 273). Larson notes that, “Nearly every conduct manual of the period emphasizes this correspondence between one’s language and one’s body” (21). Early modern conversation was gendered, performative,

and bodily, subjecting women to pressures about how they were to speak, look, move, and even grieve, as Dormer's example showed us.

For women, conversation goes much further than civil behaviors to a more intimate and damaging entanglement: their sexual reputations. In the wake of this "gendered" conversation, Larson blames "the classical emphasis on the sexualized relationship between a woman's words and her body as well as on conversation's implicit association with both verbal and physical intimacy" (30). In *The Booke Named the Governour* (1531), Thomas Elyot suggests that "young boys preparing for public service be taken 'from the company of women' after age seven" (Larson 30). Larson notes that "Elyot places careful emphasis on the corrupting, and implicitly sexualized, influence of women's conversation, insisting that the growing boy have limited contact with female companions" (Larson 30). Seen in the previous section, women's bodies/words were so threatening to their male counterparts that conduct manuals advised parents to keep their boys away from women until they had the self-control needed to resist them. While boys were taught to avoid women, girls were taught to remain quiet and highly disciplined in their speech in order not to tarnish their reputations. For women, words, just like their bodies, were their salvation (upholding their chaste and pure reputation) and their grief (slander, sexual implications). Larson comments on this cultural teaching about conversation and one of the plays we will unpack later:

Conversation...tapped into popular anxieties concerning the speaking woman, whose words were assumed to herald an unchecked sexual appetite. It is precisely this fear that prompts Herod to question Mariam's virtue and command her death in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613): 'She's unchaste; / Her mouth will open to every



stranger's ear' (4.432-3). Mariam dies largely because of Herod's inability to reconcile her seemingly paradoxical commitment to sexual virtue and verbal openness (30). Consequently, how did early modern women bypass these "popular anxieties" about them that could very well be their downfall, like Mariam's was for her? In the event of loss or even a small inconvenience, many women solved the problem through grieving emotionally and bodily. Often, grief was the great exception to societal restrictions on the speaking woman. Suffering through visible tears, debilitating sickness, and few words gave women an agency that was (on the surface) unthreatening. For instance, Mary Sidney found incredible authorial opportunity through her own grief over her brother's death.

Conversation meets emotion when you think about it in humoural terms. Conversing for women and having "an open countenance" which Richard Brathwaite warns does not "sort...well" with a "restrained bosome" in *The English Gentlewoman* (1631) exacerbates the prejudice against women as sanguine (even as they were denoted colder than men, bodily-speaking) (72). Talking with someone brings heat to the body, manifested through flushed cheeks, bright eyes, and bodily movement such as the nonverbal use of the hands. Grief, on the other hand, is associated with choleric melancholy, bringing about coldness and the closure of blood to the heart. Grief aligns humourally with women's colder, wetter bodies, functioning as a more socially acceptable action for women to take. Thus, when women experienced fits, vexations, or true overpowering grief, their reputations were not on the line, because they were acting in accordance with a certain interpretation of their regulated bodies. Larson expounds on this reality: "The self-regulation intrinsic to conversational decorum in conduct literature of the period became for women synonymous with physical self-containment" (32). Within an emotional, society-sanctioned cage, women discovered an emotion that slid past the bars, aligned

with their wetness, and spoke louder than words. The strict decorum enslaving their tongues to chastity loosened when it came to women outwardly grieving. The sexual association of their tears to sexual leakiness like ovulation was “cooled” so to speak by water’s humoral coldness. But the sensual nature of grief remains in that men lusted after it, as will be seen in the male characters Hamlet and Herod.

### **Summary of Emotion: Harmonious Vapors**

Throughout these early modern perceptions of emotion and women, whether the person is a victim of emotion (passive) or an agent of emotion (active) greatly impacts the definition of grief and how women interact with it. In the case studies that follow, I examine women’s autonomy through grief in early modern tragedy. Cary and Shakespeare produce complex characters reflective of their culture, male and female, who navigate grief in conventional, rebellious, and sexed ways.

To steal from early modern medical rhetoric, a harmony develops from these various arenas of knowledge. There are many instances when such frameworks collide with one another, not polluting as Renaissance humourists would call it, but complimenting as distinct vapors. As we step into the muddy world of tragedy, taxonomies of philosophy fall away and alternate histories of women mix together when we consider how women grieve and why it matters in a masculine culture, in a masculine genre.

Shakespeare loved to play on the meta-theatricality of life ( “all the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players”). In *Hamlet* as well as in *The Tragedy of Mariam*, male characters act as poor “players” of emotion, turning to past female prototypes of grief like Hecuba for Hamlet and a real flesh-and-blood woman like Mariam who confounds Herod. In the case studies that follow, I argue that Shakespeare and Cary design male characters who *need*

grieving women, because the prevalent ideologies discussed here withheld experiential knowledge from men. Men were taught emotional suppression from boyhood; women were often performing their grief as one of the few authorized modes of expression, and when women's outward performance reflected an inward trueness, men sensed the power present in women and envied them. A reversal of the male-female power dynamic occurs when women cry and men want to but cannot. From a Shakespeare-performer's perspective, Tina Packer expresses the traditional power roles:

...women are never assumed to be apex of political power (except Cleopatra, of course), the women are always looking *at* power: either how to acquire some or how to avoid its worst violence, how to circumvent it or how to acquiesce to it, but they must watch it all the time. It is not a neutral subject to them. And of course they never just assume it's theirs to organize and exploit, as many of the men do. This means that women become skilled observers of power...the will to power is very alive to women, because there is no accepted course for them to exert influence. (xiv-xv)

In the two case studies to come, grief is a "course" for women "to exert influence," evidenced in *Hamlet's* Gertrude and Shakespeare's references to Niobe and Hecuba as well as Cary's Mariam and Alexandra. Through close textual analysis and a focus on the feminine, I aim to contribute to our understanding of grief on the early modern stage, revamping the masculine tragedy of *Hamlet* by granting the emotional authority of grief to women as well as unpacking grief's complexity and power in Cary's woman-dominated tragedy.

## CHAPTER II

### GRIEVING WOMEN IN *HAMLET*

During Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy, Denmark's Prince laments the dullness of his resolve and blames his hesitancy on "thought," his interior judgments and feelings:

And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry  
And lose the name of action. (3.1.83-87)

In Hamlet's "pale cast of thought" live weeping relic-women, Niobe, Hecuba, and a prostitute, who "turn awry" Hamlet's enterprise to revenge his father's murder. My investigation traces grief's role in the male-dominated tragedy and its inseparable link to women from the past. By comparing Hamlet's grief-less mother, Gertrude, to Hamlet's grieving female allusions, I seek to unveil the influence of feminized grief on our masculine revenger, determining whether "losing the name of action" constitutes true inactivity for Hamlet. These weeping women disturb Hamlet's resolution, giving way to a more natural, affective response to his father's death. Through close textual analysis of Hamlet's mother and his female allusions about grief, I argue that, in the first half of the tragedy, masculine action is transformed into feminine affect; Shakespeare's revenge tragedy on the surface occupies a deeper, inner world of a man attempting to grieve actively through women.

#### **Woe and Its Trappings**

I engage Hamlet's opening dialogue by first teasing out each metaphor he uses to try and explain his grief, beginning with the physical and philosophical ramifications of his eye's "fruitful river" (1.2.80). In Act I, the first mention of the word "grief" comes from Denmark's Prince in response to his mother, Gertrude's, calloused question: if "'tis common all that lives must die /

... / Why seems it so particular with thee?" about his father's death (1.2.72, 75). Hamlet responds to his mother by ushering in the word "grief" with all its complicated histories intact:

No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,  
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,  
That can denote me truly. These indeed 'seem',  
For they are actions that a man might play,  
But I have that within which passes show,  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.80-86)

Hamlet's first lengthy response in the play encapsulates grief's anxieties that we addressed in the previous chapter ("all forms, moods, shapes of grief"). Hamlet covers grief's physical effects in tears, the social behavior of the downcast face, and the philosophical complication of outward "show" versus inward "woe." The first line, "nor the fruitful river in the eye," initiates an obvious association between grief and tears continued throughout the tragedy, yet this obvious connection proves striking when the inconsistencies in emotion *felt* and emotion *performed* disrupt Hamlet's course of action. In a play concerned with discernment ("marking" the Ghost, Claudius, Queen Gertrude, and his close friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern), Hamlet couples grief and tears, revealing his initial desire to keep the relationship of outward and inward pure. Hamlet references grief as a "fruitful river in the eye" that connotes a naturalness about physical expression flowing directly from inward feeling. For many early moderns, nature was complete, ordered, and called "good" by God when he created it (Genesis 1). Therefore, Hamlet situates his grief within a pure Nature that lacks deception (insomuch as it reflects its Creator's goodness in its postlapsarian state), but, at the same time, Hamlet rejects this association as adequate to denote his grief. While pure because of its Maker, Nature is cursed by the Fall (as Hamlet in medieval Denmark would have believed). Moving from a physical association to a philosophical conclusion, Stanley Cavell explicates the line as explicative of Hamlet's melancholy philosophy:

“I understand Hamlet’s ‘knowing not ‘seems’” as expressing the presence in him of a world altogether different from theirs...his general mode of perception – call it mourning, call it the power, or the fate, to perceive subjectively, truly” (44). While Cavell poetically expresses Hamlet’s distinct philosophy, I find Cavell idealizes a passage that does not come from the confident, rebellious mourning philosopher who sees too much into things. I agree that this excerpt of text reveals “the presence in him of a world,” but it is not one that is “altogether different from” the other characters’ in the tragedy. Hamlet’s mourning is not some strange, foreign, superior environment to those around him, but the microcosmic reality of the early modern universe at large—a “perfect” pure Creation made by God but corrupted by deception.

Emotion’s contradictory need for outward show and outward show’s deceptive inability to fully express inward grief continues with Hamlet’s mention of facial expression and his obsession with his mother’s word “seems.” Following his “fruitful river in the eye” metaphor, Hamlet aligns grief with the “dejected haviour of the visage,” pointing to the relational, communicative act of facial expressions (1.2.81). After listing the river, the face, and other physical evidence of grief like the breath, Hamlet rejects them as not accurate enough to express true grief. His mother, Gertrude, uses the word “seems,” a pregnant word that alludes to superficiality and performance, which explains the tension between grief’s external evidences and grief as an inexplicable human experience. Gabriel Josipovici expounds on this messy passage by acknowledging Hamlet’s contradictory claims:

he insists, these are mere outward show: what I feel inside can neither be said nor shown. Yet even as he says this we realize the double-bind involved in such formulations...for his insistence that he feels far more pain than either his mother or her new husband, his uncle, has itself to be couched in what we would deem to be ‘externals’, words. (44)

As opposed to Cavell’s argument that Hamlet mourns because he sees too much into things, Josipovici reveals a double-bind in Hamlet’s philosophy. Hamlet rejects seeming sad, but he

employs a signifying vehicle—language—to denote his true feeling, true feeling expressed only through the contrast of outward show. For Hamlet, seeming is a necessary evil for seeing.

The difference between seeming and seeing comes down to the word “denote” for Hamlet, or to “mark” for his father’s Ghost; these two synonymous words in the first act point to the inherent tension in Hamlet’s grief (1.2.83). In the same response to his mother, Hamlet completes his thought by saying that none of grief’s physical aspects “can denote [him] truly” (1.2.83). The *OED* provides the early modern meaning of “denote” as “To mark; to mark out (from among others); to distinguish by a mark or sign.” While grief requires external indicators according to Hamlet, he explains that they are a *false* sign; his appearance is insufficient to mark what he is really feeling inside. Hamlet’s concern with the inexpressibility of his grief connects his desire to the Ghost’s when he commands Hamlet: “Mark me” upon their first meeting (1.5.2). Hamlet responds to his father, “I will” (1.5.3), but Hamlet seems to waver in his obedience to his father’s command just as he bristles at his mother’s “seems.” Later in the play before the Mousetrap, Hamlet doubts the Ghost as a potential devil, proving that to mark something is not to discern its truth perfectly—it is merely to witness the *sign* of something. Hamlet wants to prove his grief authentic over his father’s death, but because he himself is hindered by his doubts about “marking” the Ghost’s appearance, he recognizes he has no right to judge Gertrude’s word “seems.”

Grief physically manifested transforms Hamlet into “seeming” sad rather than really being sad—an actor playing at emotion in a costume. Concluding his response, Hamlet wraps up by explaining that the physical signs of grief she sees *in* him are actually *on* him (“the trappings and the suits of woe”), which should not be mistaken for the grief within. Signs are signs, whether words or physical expression, and true feeling lies inside, understood only in that the

observer will have to judge the inner emotion for the outward expression as the emotional garment it is. Directly following, Hamlet calls outward expression “actions that a man might play,” using theatrical wording here to show how outward evidence can undermine genuineness.

In Shakespeare’s culture, deception often accompanied outward show. Josipovici concurs:

Hamlet insists that he really and truly does feel pain inside. But in pressing this point upon her he is forced to admit that his dress and demeanor are something of a pose – indeed, that they are most likely to be taken as such, ‘the actions that a man might play’ – a formulation that will echo throughout this play, as both *play-acting* and *action* and the relations between them become the central issues. (44)

Not only does inward feeling cause the outward expression, but the *reception* of the outward show can actually sabotage the trueness of the inward feeling. Katharine Eisaman Maus explicates the passage in this way: “For Hamlet, the internal experience of his own grief ‘passes show’ in two senses. It is beyond scrutiny, concealed where other people cannot perceive it. And it surpasses the visible—its validity is unimpeachable. The exterior, by contrast, is partial, misleading, falsifiable, unsubstantial” (4). While Maus rightly divides the concealed interior and the misleading exterior, there exists a reciprocity of the external and internal that should not be overlooked here. For Hamlet, his exterior grief goes beyond being merely insubstantial, acting as a transformative reality affecting the original emotion within. Due to this reciprocal relationship, Hamlet’s true grief may only be found in solitude, safe from speculation that may turn his grieving into play-acting.

With externality’s deceptive nature in mind, we may ask as Rosencrantz does of Hamlet later in the play “To what end, my lord?” (2.2.248). To what end should we study characters’ interior emotional ‘realities’ on a stage played by actors always before a prying audience? Or less metatheatrical than that, to what end do we seek to understand the inner relational and individual grief plaguing early modern characters like Shakespeare’s Hamlet or Cary’s Mariam?



Eisaman Maus argues against the need for a realizable end: “Hamlet’s conviction that truth is unspeakable implicitly devalues any attempts to express or communicate it” (1). Indeed, she continues, “It is hard to imagine what could possibly count as ‘true denotation’ for Hamlet” (1). However, neither Shakespeare nor other early modern writers shy away from the “hopeless” investigation into the inner truth existing behind (or even within) outward show (Maus).

### **“To what end?”**

Rather than claiming an end goal, Maus answers the “to what end” question by focusing on the act of investigation itself. In her book on inwardness, she explains that to attempt it is to participate trans-temporally with Shakespeare and other early moderns who found a “need” to explore this dichotomy (7). Due to the elite class growing exponentially, some early moderns were paranoid about appearing and “seeming” elite, polished, and worthy of this expanding class (Maus 8). Comparable to the present selfie generation, early moderns saw image as everything, superseding the cultural need for a true inner self. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt investigates and expounds this concept of a false and/or formulated self:

in sixteenth-century England there were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned. Of course, there is some absurdity in so bald a pronouncement of the obvious: after all, there are always selves—a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires—and always some elements of deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity. (1)

Emotion can be defined as “a structure of bounded desires,” and thus, influences an early modern’s “expression of identity,” according to Greenblatt. As I have argued, early modern grief reveals and reflects one’s gender, body makeup, philosophy, religion, and culture in remarkable ways. Maus remarks on the Renaissance world of self-fashioning by stating “what is most true about human beings in such a system is simultaneously least verifiable” (12).

In the midst of a project on such an unverifiable facet of human experience as emotion, my thesis appears fruitless in its search for interior grief based on written words or the “fruitful river in the eye”—until I reread Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s greeting of Hamlet:

Hamlet: What news?

Rosencrantz: None, my lord, but the world’s grown honest.

Hamlet: Then is doomsday near – but your news is not true. But, in the beaten way of friendship, what makes you at Elsinore?

Rosencrantz: To visit you, my lord, no other occasion...

Hamlet: ...Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, come, deal justly with me. Come, come, nay speak.

Guildenstern: What should we say, my lord?

Hamlet: Anything but to th’ purpose. You were sent for, *and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which your modesties have not craft enough to colour*. I know the good King and Queen have sent for you. (2.2.230-247 emphasis mine)

Potentially already suspecting his comrades’ loyalties lie elsewhere, Hamlet questions them—

either out of genuine curiosity or to test their honesty. When Rosencrantz outright lies to his friend, Hamlet, perhaps having seen their countenances and caught on, leads them to the truth aggressively with many questions beginning with “Were you not sent for?” Hamlet ends his prompting with “Come, come, nay speak,” desperately longing for their words to be truthful.

Yet, his friend disappoints him: Guildenstern evades Hamlet’s combative prompting, asking timidly “What should we say, my lord?”—not as a friend, but as a cornered subject.

Sarcastically, Hamlet bites back: “Anything but to th’ purpose.” What a line sharpened by bitter betrayal! We see this kind of brokenness, bitterness, and disappointment about outward deceit from Hamlet when he cries out, “O most pernicious woman,/ O villain, villain, smiling damned villain!” about his mother and uncle’s behavior (1.5.106). With his two friends, however, Hamlet is relieved to find truth in his friends’ expressions—in their seeming.

When Hamlet perceives the truth, the inner ‘reality’ (a ‘reality’ verifiable by the audience through their facial expressions), that they were indeed summoned by his mother and uncle,

Hamlet views it as a Catholic purgation of sin: “there is a kind of confession in their looks.” This religious reference shows the *possibility* of discovering inner truth for outward behavior: this time in physical expression, at other times in words, at its most potent in actions. Hamlet’s practice of looking for the inward in the outward is approved by early moderns and practiced by Shakespeare. The culture and text itself validate my investigation into Hamlet’s grief and why this revenge tragedy’s revenger is not some rebel, melancholy philosopher with penetrating sight, but confused and dumbfounded in his grief, propelling him to find answers in powerful grieving women.

### **Gertrude: “Cold mother”**

One cannot speak of women and grief in *Hamlet* without talking about the “queen-mother,” the “pernicious woman,” Gertrude—the antithesis of genuine feminine grief (1.5.105). Unlike other scholars who view her as a flat, uninspiring, Shakespeare-hates-mothers/women stock character, I argue that there is more to Gertrude than meets the eye, especially considering how Shakespeare contrasts her with other overtly emotional women in the tragedy. Rather than a flat female character or a victim of Shakespeare’s neglect, Gertrude is enigmatically characterized, inviting suspicion. It takes a strange maternal nature to speak such words to her son upon his father’s death:

Good Hamlet, cast thy knighted colour off  
.....  
Do not for ever with thy vailed lids  
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.  
Though knowst ’tis common all that lives must die  
.....  
Why seems it so particular with thee? (1.2.68, 70-71, 75)

Is Gertrude truly unintelligent and heartless, as her ridiculous question to her son supposes? Old Hamlet was her husband after all, so the grief should be “particular” to her as well. Based on some of her other astute and sympathetic lines in the play (“More matter with less art” to

Polonius and calling her son tenderly a “poor wretch”), Gertrude seems not totally devoid of reason or humanity (2.2.95, 165). Denmark’s Queen fascinates audiences because of what Shakespeare leaves out about her; what he includes offers clues about a lusty, sanguine, vapid woman.

Later in the scene during Hamlet’s private reflection, Shakespeare demonstrates the humoral view’s inconsistencies where women are concerned. Upon his mother’s stoical question, Hamlet retorts, “‘Seems,’ madam – nay, it is, I know not ‘seems’. / ‘Tis not alone my inky cloak, cold mother” (1.2.76-77). “Cold mother” is actually Q2’s reading, while the Folio’s edition reads “good Mother.” Q2’s reading offers a more piercing insult, initiating a string of feminized insults Hamlet inflicts upon women throughout the play. In line with early moderns’ concept of humoral females, Hamlet’s title for his mother upholds women’s cold bodies. Still, Shakespeare demonstrates the scientific strangeness of “cold women” when coupling the word “cold” with the maternal and loving title of “mother.” A mother’s bosom is supposed to be warm and inviting to her child, but Gertrude exhibits a cold heart ironically frozen by the heat and sexual appetite that Hamlet claims “had grown / By what it fed on” (1.2.144-45). Hamlet calls Gertrude “cold mother” to her face publicly, but chastises her heat and passion in “incestuous sheets” when he is alone (1.2.77, 157). In his public rebuke, Hamlet points out the blatant sin of incest according to Judeo-Christian tradition (1.2.157 fn). For a man to wed his brother’s sister was considered incest well into the Reformation, even as the audience might have mixed moral opinions about it in light of Henry VIII’s controversial marriage to Katherine of Aragon, his brother’s widow (1.2.157 fn). Incest was and is considered unnatural, immoral, and out of step with societal conventions. The fact that Gertrude never acknowledges the sin of marrying her husband’s brother and seemingly couldn’t care less about her own husband’s death establishes

the audience's view of grief in a world turned upside down where incest is acceptable to all and Hamlet's genuine grief is considered strange. Another common reading of Gertrude is that she marries Claudius to protect Denmark and keep war from breaking out. While the incestuous marriage places Gertrude in a powerful role, the idea of the Queen as protector of Denmark emasculates Hamlet's desire for grief by usurping it with Gertrude's more masculine response of duty and honor. Through Hamlet's remarks, Shakespeare characterizes Denmark's cold/hot Queen's lack of grief as unnatural, incestuous, contradictory, and morally repugnant in Hamlet's eyes, and thus, in our own. Significantly, Shakespeare *masculinizes* Gertrude in her indifference and marriage to Claudius, aligning her more closely with Claudius who takes a manlier approach to the death of his brother.

Ironically, this association with the masculine grants Gertrude very little agency or influence in the play. Shakespeare, Hamlet, and the audience appear to hate her for her lack of emotion; Gertrude is disliked and powerless before the plot is developed much at all, due to her lack of feminine grief. With all the characters, Shakespeare invites us to judge them or "mark" them (as Hamlet does) according to their emotional response to Old Hamlet's death. Rather than women serving as "prototypes for male grief" as my title promises, our masculine tragedy opens with a "cold" masculine mother. Hamlet's hate towards his mother has resonated with many scholars to the point that they allow this negativity to cloud their view of Hamlet and how he views women (for instance, dwelling on Hamlet verbally attacking Ophelia as opposed to his previous love letter to her). I do not contend that Hamlet loves women and seeks to empower them—far from it. Rather, I see Hamlet *envying* grieving women, recognizing their feminine agency in grief, an agency that his masculine mother does not possess. Out of Gertrude's subversive (yet inhibiting) coldness and heat, she forces her son to seek identification with other

mourning females. Allusions to women like Niobe, Hecuba, and a prostitute expose feminine power in their grief. After all, grief was a male-approved emotion for early moderns, enabling women to cope with tragedy and express their thoughts in a culture that silenced the speaking woman, as will we see later in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*.

But before turning to *Hamlet*'s first grieving woman, Niobe, Hamlet gets one last dig at his mother by employing a "misogynist cliché," using the word "Frailty" to describe his mother's lustful appetite. Through Hamlet's insults towards women and about women, Shakespeare often places power in the hands of the grieving woman and makes his supposedly hyper-masculine revenger resent her for it. In his first soliloquy, Hamlet disparages Gertrude (and all women) by crying out "Frailty, thy name is Woman!" in the midst of his digression (1.2.146). The famous line is a serious insult inflicted against the word "frailty" and against the idea of a "Woman." The objects of his derision serve as the instruments of his insult; the two nouns are interchangeable and could just have easily been worded: "Woman, thy name is Frailty!" The *OED* defines "frailty" during this period as "moral weakness; instability of mind; liability to err or yield to temptation." Hamlet sees his cold mother as "frail" because she does not have the moral power to grieve or the strength to mourn properly.

With this in mind, it makes sense that Hamlet tells his own heart to break later in the play ("for I must hold my tongue"), because he associates frailty not with excessive emotion but with *stifled* emotion. Josipovici analyzes the line in the traditional trend of most scholars: "[Hamlet] reaches out for some solid ground to hold on to, coming up with the kind of misogynist cliché that had been an ingrained part of the Christian culture of the Middle Ages (a woman was, after all, responsible for the greatest calamity to have befallen mankind)" (48). I agree with Josipovici and many other Shakespeare scholars who deem Hamlet a misogynist, but I argue that Hamlet is

sexist predominantly in front of other characters—which is always partly a performance. After all, Hamlet’s “Get thee to a nunnery!” and his verbal attack on his mother are *after* Hamlet has put on his “antic disposition” (3.1). Prior to assuming a new masked self, Hamlet shows little evidence of such intense misogyny in his soliloquies. When Josipovici analyzes “Frailty, thy name is woman!”, he blames the sexism on Shakespeare’s Christian context, arguing that Hamlet and Christians are anti-women. Josipovici seems selective and discriminatory due to the fact that Catholics prayed to a woman, the Virgin Mary, who brought the world’s Savior into the world and was made holy through her intercourse with God. In medieval Denmark, Hamlet’s misogynist phrase would have been more out of place than in Shakespeare’s own Reformed culture. From medieval mystic women to the Virgin Mary, Christian cultures in the Middle Ages empowered women through faith in ways that early modern humourism and social conventions never did.

Compared to medieval Catholic women had emotional autonomy in their passionate faith, Gertrude, Denmark’s Queen, is obviously no mystic. But, just three lines after the “Frailty” insult, Hamlet compares his mother instead to a pagan—a grieving woman called Niobe. Few scholars seem to care much about the female allusion tucked away in Hamlet’s rant. The sarcastic reference to a famous grieving woman (“Like Niobe, all tears”) can easily be missed, but Niobe is key to unlocking what Hamlet meant by calling Gertrude and all women “frail.” As Hamlet’s discourse unfolds, Hamlet’s most passionate offense against his mother actually functions as thickly veiled praise, an outward emblem of interior envy. Niobe, the notorious grieving woman to whom Hamlet alludes to just three lines later, is *not* frail and stands in stark contrast to his mother who is. In Hamlet’s mind, Gertrude is weak *not* because she is a woman, but because she does not grieve like Niobe does.

Not only do Hamlet's words about his mother, women, and grief confuse us in their subjectivity, there exists a debate as to whether his soliloquies are truly inward thoughts, bare and naked, as Shakespeare intends them to be. Josipovici argues for inwardness in the soliloquies: "Gone is the sharp and false contrast between outward show, including speech, and inner, unspeakable truth; now he is using language to try to get at something he feels but cannot quite express...full of dashes, sharp breaks, exclamations of failure – to talk to [himself]" (46). On the other hand, Amelia Worsley suggests that the nature of his private speeches doesn't really matter: "As he voices his anger, his speech seems to rescue him from incommunicative isolation....Whether he is seen to acknowledge the audience or be imagining an invisible auditor, he has little difficulty unburdening himself of his thoughts" (540). Indeed, with the highly formal and syntactical structure of the line "Frailty, thy name is woman!", the soliloquy functions less as internal thought and more as devised speech for an audience. Though he may be "alone" on stage, Hamlet sometimes is hyper-aware of the meta-world operating around him, even at times referring to the exact playhouse as he does when talking to the Ghost: "In this distracted globe" (1.5.97). Through Hamlet's stylized phrase "Frailty, thy name is Woman!", he is performing the societal conventions of his audience (woman as frail, weak, and inconstant). However, he directs the insult toward a masculinized, cold mother who lacks the power and strength to grieve. Subsequently, when Hamlet calls Gertrude frail, her frailty is not defined according to Shakespeare's historical context. With such a contradictory insult/praise, it explains why many critics and editors have grouped all of Hamlet's feminized insults and allusions to women as he wishes for them to be received—in a negative light. Yet the many allusions to women that follow formulate Hamlet's position toward grieving women as an envious one. Hamlet invokes women empowered in their feminized grief, inspiring my focus on a female-assigned emotion that



creates subversive agency. Nevertheless, the masculine, “cold Mother” Gertrude proves to us that women also can find power in male-like indifference.

**Niobe: “She weeps as no stone can”**

Gertrude exhibits a certain authority in taking action after her husband’s death by marrying his brother, but Niobe’s agency as a stone statue requires a bit more excavation. Shakespeare overtly characterizes Hamlet’s grief as unmanly by having Hamlet call upon grieving women of antiquity (Niobe, Hecuba) and the slandered women of his present (the whore, strumpet, Ophelia) to help him grieve. But why does it matter that Hamlet cannot grieve as a man, so he tries to embody feminine grievers? It matters because early modern revenge tragedies are almost always hyper-masculine, with Hamlet often living in our minds as a male Oedipal genius who hates women. I aim to refute this dominant view by resurrecting key female allusions that feminize Hamlet and grief in a positive way.

Hamlet seeks female representations of grief as a direct response to his new father figure emasculating him. This chapter’s common thread thus far—Hamlet and Gertrude’s conversation about grief—concludes with Claudius interjecting in abrasive fashion:

To do obsequious sorrow; but to persevere  
In obstinate condolement is a course  
Of impious stubbornness, ‘tis unmanly grief,  
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,  
A heart unfortified, or mind impatient. (1.2.92-96)

First, Claudius misrepresents Hamlet’s true grief as mere “mourning duties,” then he emasculates his own distorted view of Hamlet’s grief (“tis unmanly”), and he concludes by shaming the act spiritually (“tis a fault to heaven”). All of Claudius’s accusations are upheld by historical views regarding grief and its gendered restrictions, but calling Hamlet’s grief womanly could well have been the most damaging insult. Throughout the tragedy, Hamlet is bent on showing public

disrespect and even disgust towards women. Nevertheless, grieving women are exempt from Hamlet's bitter attacks, garnering respect, envy, and power in the revenger's consciousness (even if they're often used as weapons against other women). With Claudius's slander ringing in Hamlet's ears, Hamlet summons female prototypes for grief, as opposed to famous male grievers, to express his passionate emotion.

The first weeping woman Hamlet calls upon, Niobe of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, boasts of a masculine sin even as she is remembered for a feminine, mourning response to her eternal punishment. Niobe's mythical story deserves close attention, due to its strangely overlooked role in *Hamlet* that has inspired such prolific scholarship. Very few scholarly works, commentaries, or footnotes take the time to note Niobe's presence at all, glossing over the insult as if Shakespeare carelessly included it. Niobe deserves scholarly resurrection: she is the *second* woman mentioned in the tragedy, demanding a comparison with Denmark's cold-hearted, burning-bosomed queen.

Niobe's story is as much about hubris as it is about sorrow. The Greek story goes (with slight variations) that Niobe was stunningly beautiful and the paragon of women, producing seven sons and seven daughters. Niobe is said to have bragged about herself often and drew attention to her strong lineage, but Ovid explains that "these were all trifles / Compared to her basic boast, that she had the best of all children,/ That she had been blessed in motherhood better than any woman/ Who ever lived" (*Metamorphoses*). As a maternal, fertile woman, Niobe contains the humoral sexual implications of women as "wet" and "cold," secreting reproductive fluid as a child-bearer and providing sustaining milk for her children. In both this allusion and Hecuba's to come, Shakespeare conjures feminine grief with its connection to female sexuality intact. When commanded to worship at Latona's temple, Niobe "refuses...to worship...claiming

she herself ought to be worshipped” (Orr). Latona, mother of Apollo and Diana, “is offended and appeals to her divine offspring”:

But this proud woman defies me,  
As if those creatures down there had voted us in or could somehow  
Impeach or recall those gods and goddesses they didn’t care for.  
What kind of cosmos is that? We are all insulted, but I  
In particular am the object of the insolence she shows us. (*Metamorphoses* 110)

Niobe materializes from antiquity as a “proud woman,” defiant, rebellious, and endowed with a sense of power in her refusal to worship a goddess. Her power is derived directly from her womanliness: her beauty, her name-recognition, and her ability to bear children. Niobe is undeniably both feminine and powerful. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare uses her name to defy the early modern context in which he was writing, a context that stripped power away from women by prescribing them only certain emotions. And in Shakespeare’s tragedy obsessed with fate and agency, Niobe’s name from Hamlet’s lips challenges not only the goddess Latona in Niobe’s own history, but casts judgment on Denmark’s Prince who could not even resist his mother’s request to stay in Denmark.

As a result, the name Niobe evokes much more than a passive sorrowful stone figure, but a great battle of wills between defiant woman and vengeful goddess. In fact, Latona and Niobe, a female adversarial pair, may act as foils for Claudius and Hamlet, a powerful King and a rebellious Prince. Following the clash of two mighty women comes the gory massacre enacted by Apollo and Diana revenging their mother’s glory on Niobe. Horrific and heartbreaking depictions of this revenge in art abound during the sixteenth century and following. Artists were drawn to her grief and sought to visually capture a mother’s devastating loss. Tragically, Apollo and Diana kill all thirteen of Niobe’s children. When one last child remains, a daughter, Niobe cries:

“Oh, spare her! Leave me, this last,  
This innocent baby, my darling...For pity’s sake, I implore...  
Spare her!” But all in vain, for the girl shuddered and died  
There in her arms. No response or breath or pulse. Gone!  
All gone! And the childless mother looks around her, smitten  
And longing herself for death, all her sons and her daughters  
And her husband are dead, and her poor body, obstreperous, stupid,  
Is living and breathing still. (*MO* 113)

In Ovid’s graphic account, parallels between Niobe and Hamlet proliferate. Niobe loses all of her dearly loved children, a fate much worse and unnatural than Hamlet losing his father. Niobe experiences the unbearable pain of hopelessness as a survivor of a tragic event, modeling for Hamlet how to grieve properly as he goes through a lesser trial. Niobe “longing herself for death” hates her mortal body with suicidal intentions just as Hamlet longs to disappear: “O that this too too sallied flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew” (1.2.129-30). In contrast, Niobe witnesses her children’s slaughter, which is horrific in its own right. Yet, Hamlet is forced to trust others’ accounts (the Ghost, his mother, his uncle) in what really happened to his father. Grief is made complicated and may haunt the mourner who cannot receive closure—seeing the deceased and understanding *why* and exactly *how* they died.

In his essay on Niobe as a historical and literary figure, Gregory Orr comments: “But Niobe’s story doesn’t complete its arc merely by traveling from hubris to horror: there is also a final transformation that the witnessing and enduring of horror sometimes works on humans” (674). As Ovid describes,

In stony silence she stares  
At the bodies she’d held and nursed and bathed, all cold as stones,  
As still as stones. No breeze would dare to ruffle her hair.  
Her face is pale and unmoving, her eyes are as fixed as a statue’s,  
And her tongue is a stone in her mouth. Her veins, muscles, and organs  
All are stone, but she weeps as no stone can. She weeps  
A rain of tears. A whirlwind catches her up, transports her  
Back to her native soil, and there, on a mountain peak,  
Sets her down where she stands, today, a pillar of marble,

And the water that trickles in twin rivulets are her tears. (*MO* 113)

Here Ovid gets ahead of himself, imposing Niobe's legacy onto her sexed, grieving body. He foreshadows her eventual stone state by repetitively using the word "stone" in what grief does to her. The language affirms women's passive grief in the humoral and cultural views, but a striking turn occurs, which may be the sole reason that Hamlet verbally summons Niobe from her stony fate. As everything is turning to stone (her gaze, her children's corpses, her tongue, veins, muscles, organs), Niobe *acts* upon her grief in a powerful, rebellious way: "she weeps as no stone can." She expresses her grief truly, not seemingly, leaving her audience no doubt of her grief's authenticity. She weeps *despite* what fate inflicted upon her; her petrified body cannot halt her powerful tears. Her grief creates activity; the flowing of tears reflects Hamlet's "fruitful river in the eye," endowing her stone state with movement and life. With her commanding and defiant tears, Niobe is restored to her homeland and immortalizes her grief. In Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*, another stone monument lends itself to this discussion, yet it is the lesser of the two. Herod, in his madness upon killing the wife he idolized, concludes the play with these words:

A stone upon the vault someone shall lay,  
Which monument shall an inscription have,  
And these shall be the words it shall contain:  
'Here Herod lies that hath his Mariam slain.' (5.1.255-58)

For Herod as a man, his stone monument may speak for him in written words, even when the man is a murderer, but for a woman like Niobe, she receives no inscription—her flowing tears must tell her story. And for Hamlet who is maddened by words' duplicity, he may find restoration and comfort in a grieving woman's wordless expression.

Niobe's continual crying transformed her into a lasting monument—but a monument to what? Hamlet remembers Niobe in a sarcastic, biting remark to Gertrude, expressing his derision of his mother's transitory grief:

A little month, or e'er those shoes were old  
With which she followed my poor father's body,  
Like Niobe, all tears. Why, she –  
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason  
Would have mourned longer – married with my uncle,  
My father's brother (but no more like my father  
Than I to Hercules). (1.2.147-53)

Instead of grieving like Niobe, Gertrude acts. She marries Claudius and moves on from the emotion. Upon this contemplation of his mother's refusal to mourn, Hamlet laments: "It is not, nor it cannot come to good; / But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (1.2.158-9). Here, Hamlet affiliates himself with Niobe in her stony quietness; however, in Hamlet's commandment for his heart to break, his internal commotion does not outwardly or culturally fit into the typical masculine response to death. Worsley contends that "Outward signs can't be an accurate indicator of inward states, though the play doesn't discount the possibility of the existence of those states" (527). In light of this, theatrical limitations on true inwardness and masculine restrictions compel Hamlet to envy Niobe's dual passivity and activity in grief: a feminized grieving emotional state that Denmark, as well as early modern England, refused him.

### **Hecuba: "The mobled queen"**

Just as Hamlet calls upon Niobe to express his grief in Act I, he turns to Hecuba, "the mobled queen," in Act II; Hecuba's enigmatic title reveals Hamlet's complicated view about grief and Denmark's/early modern England's contradictory views about mourning women (2.2.440). As the Player expounds on Pyrrhus killing Priam, Hamlet seems disinterested and interjects: "Say on, come to Hecuba," desiring to hear more of Priam's mourning widow rather than Pyrrhus, the

revenger (2.2.439). Player as performer and Hamlet as interfering audience continue their interaction:

1 PLAYER: *But who – ah woe – had seen the mobled queen –*  
HAMLET: ‘The mobled queen’!  
POLONIUS: That’s good.  
1 PLAYER: -- *Run barefoot up and down, threatening the flames*  
*With bisson rheum, a clout upon that head*  
*Where late the diadem stood and, for a robe,*  
*About her lank and all-o’erteemed loins,*  
*A blanket in the alarm of fear caught up.*  
*Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steeped,*  
*‘Gainst Fortune’s state would treason have pronounced.*  
*But if the gods themselves did see her then,*  
*When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport*  
*In mincing with his sword her husband’s limbs,*  
*The instant burst of clamour that she made*  
*(Unless things mortal move them not at all)*  
*Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven*  
*And passion in the gods. (2.2.440-55)*

Hecuba’s description reveals an ambiguity characterized as overtly *woman*, a woman Hamlet desperately wishes to hear more of when the Player concentrates on Pyrrhus’s revenge instead. According to the Arden editors, Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, the adjective “mobled” that appears in the Q2 version of *Hamlet* and is “(also found in Q1)...was an unusual word” (271). They go on to say that “It is usually glossed as meaning ‘muffled’ or ‘veiled’..., but generations of playgoers must have found it a vaguely impressive word without knowing what it meant” (271). From this first introduction of her as distorted or covered, Hecuba may represent grief’s hiddenness by linguistically refusing to be identified by the audience as conclusively *this* or *that*. Hamlet appears so struck by Hecuba’s strange title that he repeats the Player’s words “‘The mobled queen!’” (2.2.441). On the surface, the contrast between his mother Queen and Hecuba, the mobled queen, is striking due to their opposite emotional responses to their husbands’ deaths—one calloused and the other grief-stricken. However, Hamlet’s desire for Hecuba goes

much deeper. Hamlet repeating the phrase “the mobled queen” may also reveal an internal process of viewing Hecuba as a vehicle or persona for him to walk in as he seeks to understand his own emotions and express them outwardly.

There is an alternative word option for the “mobled queen,” also associating Hecuba with grief’s feminine paradoxes. *Hamlet*’s Folio version uses the changed word “*inobled* queen,” and this substituted adjective also appears as a correction in Q8 published in 1655 (f.n. 2.2.441). Consequently, Thompson and Taylor explain that some editors, like Caldecott and MacDonald for instance, define the term as either “made noble” or its opposite, “ignobled” or degraded (f.n. 2.2.441). Hecuba’s grief over her husband murdered before her eyes can be viewed one of two ways: as a *noble* response for a woman because of grief’s feminized classification or as an *ignoble* response to death for gendered, societal, and political reasons. Hecuba’s grief may first be made ignoble because of her excessive crying that shows a lack of bodily self-control: “The instant burst of clamor that she made” (2.2.452). Her absence of self-control is made overtly feminine and sexual with the emphasis on her reproductive female body parts: “About her lank and all-o’erteemed loins” (2.2.443). Shakespeare sexualizes crying females in a fashion that may expose Hamlet’s preoccupation with them as repressed, lustful desire. Even still, “ignoble queen” could also refer to Hecuba’s new station in life—a pitiful widow crying among the remains of a burning city. In this one scene, we get a compilation of the early modern restrictions placed on women and Hecuba’s transcendent power. Similarly, Hamlet may feel all three meanings of Hecuba’s title: “mobled” or hidden in confusion about his father’s murder, ignoble in his feminine desire for unmanly grief, and ignoble in station as a usurped, fatherless prince at his uncle’s hands. As Hamlet struggles throughout the play to discern a right course of action and



response to the Ghost, Hecuba characterized from the beginning as a “mobled queen” embodies an emotional and cognitive dilemma for Hamlet.

As we’ve seen in Niobe and Hecuba, Shakespeare constructs a remarkable pattern of female tears associated with sexual or female secretion, becoming more humoral with Hecuba. In Act II, the Player describes Hecuba as experiencing “bisson rheum” or “blinding tears” (fn 271). According to the *OED*, “bisson” means “blinding.” “Rheum” denotes “Watery or mucous secretions, especially as collecting in or dripping from the eyes, nose, or mouth, originally believed to originate in the brain or head and to be capable of causing disease; a secretion of this nature (obscure). In early use also: a flow or flux (of humours) (obscure)” (*OED*). In describing Hecuba’s “bisson rheum,” the Galenic humoral doctrine helps Shakespeare convey emotions’ intense physicality, yet Hecuba’s female body is not a victim of this physical grieving, as humourists like Timothie Bright would have us believe. While Hecuba and Niobe are able to articulate their grief through tears (liquid flowing from their feminine bodies), the humoral framework also argues that tears drip from the brain. The irresolvable connection between the corporeal body and the intellectual mind is embodied in these women. Consequently, Hamlet’s attraction to these grieving women may reveal an unhealthy block in Hamlet’s physical, mental, and spiritual self—as if he were stuck in a cognitive wheel of contemplation, unable to release his grief.

Shakespeare employs Niobe’s and Hecuba’s grieving for the same purpose of wailing women in the Bible, using them to propel his titular hero to deal with his grief and process it enough to act. In her discussion of crying women as emblems of survival in Scripture, L. Juliana M. Claassens talks about how sociologist Tova Gamliel “further describes the act of wailing as cathartic; the communal act of weeping releases emotional pressure that weighs heavy on

subjects (compare with the language of ‘liberation’ that is regularly used to describe the action of releasing pent-up emotions associated with weeping)” (68). Claassens elaborates on the process of shedding tears: “Trauma often leaves people numb, confused, and unable to express their emotions. By means of a combination of tears and well-chosen words and metaphors, thus fulfilling both an affective and a cognitive function, wailing women helped people break through their silence toward a basic, often raw, vocalizing of grief” (68). Hamlet’s experience as emotional trauma illuminates more clearly the roles of Niobe and Hecuba as distinct yet complementary emblems of healthy emotional expression. Niobe’s weeping stone face remains a natural landmark in Mount Sipylus to this day, and Hecuba’s “instant burst of clamour” “drowns the stage with tears,” as Hamlet reflected (2.2.453, 497). Both of these female griever cry excessively, but in their passionate grief, they “break through the silence” and “release the emotional pressure” of those around them (Claassens 68). After listening to Hecuba’s experience, Hamlet finds a way to break through his silence “toward a basic, often raw, vocalizing of grief,” and on the Shakespearean stage, that manifests itself in soliloquies.

### **Sight of the Widow**

The idea of aloneness sets Hamlet’s third soliloquy into motion, revealing how grief can be both isolating and freeing. The soliloquy’s first line makes a statement that ripples throughout the speech: “Now I am alone” (2.2.484). However, the silent audience’s obvious presence seems to discredit Hamlet’s solitude. In fact, Hamlet is no more alone than Niobe or Hecuba were.

Niobe’s grief is immortalized in antiquity and Hecuba must mourn and wail before an audience of gods: “But if the gods themselves did see her then / ... / The instant burst of clamour that she made / ... / Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven” (2.2.450, 453, 455). Thus, Hamlet longs desperately for solitude and wishes for the ability to disregard the silent audience

before him, but he contradicts these internal emotions with his inherent *need* for an audience. Worsley concurs in her discussion about Ophelia's true loneliness as opposed to Hamlet's artificial loneliness: "By refusing the convention whereby solitariness is an occasion for self-revelation, she exposes the conceit of the soliloquy form: no character can be truly lonely when communicating with an audience, whether or not they speak directly to them" (525). Pure inwardness is threatened by the audience's and early modern society's inability to ever be truly alone. Marcus Nordlund's *The Shakespearean Inside* and James Hirsh's *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies* engage the topic of what a Shakespearean soliloquy *is*, attempting to figure out the enigmatic nature of Hamlet's and others' thought-speeches. Based on a close textual analysis of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy, Hirsh argues that Hamlet's soliloquies are "feigned" or "designed to be overhead for the advantage of the speaker" (Gilbert). Yet, some reviewers of his book like Anthony J. Gilbert express qualms with Hirsh's label of "feigned." Gilbert contends:

The distinction between soliloquies as self-addressed speech, and soliloquies as an expression of thought in modern interior monologues, seems to be a distinction without a difference. Thought may be expressed in highly rhetorical terms, or in the more fluid language of the interior monologue, but it cannot exist at all without language. (143)

From an actor's perspective, the most recent of our famous, high-profile Hamlets weighs in during an interview. Benedict Cumberbatch's acclaimed performance in the fall of 2015 beat London's records for selling out a play. Personally, Cumberbatch views Hamlet as truly alone in his soliloquies, aware of his audience members only as representations of his brain's impulses, a way to categorize his own thoughts. Both scholars and actors agree there is an audience, but I find that Cumberbatch, an actor who is most keenly aware of the audience, makes the most compelling argument about Hamlet as truly alone—alone in his mind.

After Hamlet claims aloneness, he delves into various “I am” statements that emerge as his negative emotional response to the Player’s performance and Hecuba’s grief. For example, the first stab comes quickly: “O, what a rogue and peasant slave *am I!*” (577, emphasis mine). Hamlet defines himself and instigates the speech’s first segment, characterized by admiration and envy for “this player here” who “in a fiction, in a dream of passion, / Could force his soul so to his own conceit” (578-80). What exactly does Hamlet admire and envie in the traveling player with “Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect / A broken voice, and his whole function suiting / With forms to his conceit” (582-84). Importantly, Hamlet does not seem to covet Pyrrhus’s “bleeding sword” that “falls on Priam” in the Player’s speech, which we would expect from a classic revenger (516-17). Instead, Hamlet cares little for the revenger Pyrrhus and urges the player to “Say on; come to Hecuba” (526). Between Hecuba’s genuine grief and the Player’s feigned performance of it, Hamlet experiences intense confusion. Both express their grief with tears in their eyes, but we, as the audience, know the Player merely performs and Hamlet’s interior grief is real and justified. Hamlet’s inner emotions made known to the audience through his soliloquies help us distinguish between trustworthy inwardness and deceptive outward show, discerning or marking the other characters as Hamlet does.

Hamlet’s admiration for the Player’s tears is tempered by the fact that he knows they are a “dream of passion,” differentiating his performative grief from the grieving females’. Upon hearing the heartbreaking scene of Hecuba running “barefoot up and down, threat’ning the flames” searching for her husband, Hamlet admires at first the Player’s empathy when he conveys Hecuba witnessing “Pyrrhus make malicious sport / In mincing with his sword her husband’s limbs” (530, 539-40). Rather than conveying his jealousy of Hecuba directly, Hamlet expresses his desire for appropriate *passion* like the Player—the ability to force one’s “soul so to

his own conceit” (2.2.488). Even so, tempering his praise, Hamlet defines the Player’s performance of emotion as “in a fiction, in a *dream* of passion,” an evaluation of grief he does not use to describe Niobe’s or Hecuba’s emotions (2.2.487). For Hecuba and Niobe, there is no doubt they are not seeming sad—their grief is tangible and undeniable. Their grief, though it cannot be made known to us through soliloquies like Hamlet’s, is validated through their plight and loss of loved ones. Niobe weeps despite the fact that she is a stone, and Hecuba wails and wanders among the flames. This is ‘genuine’ grief in expression, but Gertrude does not grieve; instead, she acts and marries her dead husband’s brother. Some scholars, like Adrian Streete, Natasha Korda, and Mark Breitenberg, assume authenticity does not exist for early moderns, that all subjectivity is culturally-constructed. Yet, Shakespeare’s purposeful private speeches for Hamlet as well as Mariam’s powerful opening soliloquy in Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam* demonstrate an early modern need for privacy, reflection, and a self-fashioned consciousness. While Hamlet fosters a hyper-awareness of the theatrical world, he prefers Hecuba’s “instant burst of clamor” to the Player’s fake “tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,” desiring inwardness over performance.

As a result, Hamlet sees himself as “a rogue and peasant slave”—not because he cannot act out the revenge he has sworn to complete—but because Hamlet has more reason to weep for Hecuba than the Player and he does not. Hamlet laments, “What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, / That he should weep for her? / What would he do / Had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have?” (586-89). Hamlet envies the Player as well as Hecuba, the mourning wife of Priam slain. Hamlet admires the widow for her “instant burst of clamor,” but he may resent her for her precious gift of sight: “When she *saw* Pyrrhus make malicious sport” (emphasis mine). Alas, Hamlet does not see the murder of his father, King of Denmark, when Claudius

poisons him. Hamlet does not get to run barefoot among the flames, but must traverse the dark, unseen corners of his mind, sifting through murky evidence and searching for purpose from a Ghost who Hamlet admits in the same soliloquy “May be a devil” (628). In this uncertainty lies his apparent apathy, and in his admiration of the Player’s passion through “tears in his eyes,” Hamlet envies another grieving woman.

Hamlet now turns to himself as an object of observation (or ridicule), pointing out a masculine deficiency that makes him “dull” and separates him from the healthy grieving females (593). During the third soliloquy’s second section, Hamlet’s self-fashioning flags of “I am” culminate in him insulting Claudius. Directly following his admiration/envy of the Player and Hecuba, Hamlet turns inward with a self-defining appositive: “*Yet I, / A dull and muddy-mettled rascal*” (593-94, emphasis mine). The insult muddy-mettled or “dull-spirited” does not relate directly to Hamlet’s inaction as a revenger or even the uncertainty that plagues him in contrast to Hecuba’s sight; rather, Hamlet slights himself for dullness, for spiritlessness (not something we as an audience would ever think of the demonstrative prince). Even though Hamlet has sought out women to embody grief for him, he still feels the masculine weight of needing to act. The further Hamlet plunges into self-reflection, his “I am” statements arrive more to the point, such as “*I am* pigeon-livered and lack gall” and of course the show-stopping question: “*Am I a coward?*” (604, 598 emphasis mine). Worsley comments on this passage that “Even as he undermines his own ability to represent his emotions, he uses the conceit of two very well-timed rhetorical questions to work himself up into a passion” (542). His self-insults become increasingly hostile and violent, feeding on each other until he has isolated himself from Niobe’s appropriate stillness and Hecuba’s healthy flowing tears

## The Heart of a Whore

Hamlet's verbal self-flagellation brings us finally to the "whore" section of the soliloquy, distinct in Hamlet's emotional, feminized breakdown. After declaring "Why, what an ass *am I!*" (2.2.611), Hamlet employs his first sarcastic insult, applying it to the situation rather than to himself:

*This is most brave,  
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,  
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words  
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,  
A stallion! Fie upon't! Foh!  
About, my brains! (611-16)*

Hamlet's stream of consciousness ends in wordless exclamations of "Fie" and "foh!," signaling an emotional breakdown. Hamlet identifies with the prostitute's emotionless response, needing to unpack her heart with words rather than with real passion. Hamlet contrasts the prostitute with the previous two examples of idyllic grief—the pure, expressive women of Niobe and Hecuba. Like Hamlet, the whore can only use words to express herself because she does not truly feel the emotions that should precede her sexual acts. And with the line "Fall a'cursing like a drab, a stallion," Hamlet is resigned to emotional impotency, doomed to the masculine convention. He cannot deal with the emotions caused by his father's murder and his mother's betrayal in a healthy way like Niobe and Hecuba model for him, so he insults himself and his pathetic limitation to strictly verbal communication as lowly and ignoble.

Additionally, Hamlet returns to the insult of cowardice, but in this instance, it is contrasted with bravery. At first glance, Hamlet sarcastically derides his hesitancy to revenge his father's death in light of the appositive: "That I, the son of a dear father murdered," but this appositive and its succeeding phrase merely distract from the subject I's predicate and ultimate

victim of his scorn: “Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words.” Importantly, the modal “must” stands out amidst preceding modals relating to revenge: “I *should have* fatted all the region kites / With this slave’s offal,” for instance (606-7). Hamlet uses the word “must” with the prostitute, communicating an inevitable association with her. He can communicate with words, but the masculine requirement to revenge limits his briefly-found feminine agency. Hamlet “should have” revenged his father’s death immediately, but he aligns himself with the whore who speaks and feels nothing in linguistically-binding fashion. The modal “must” makes his comparison to a whore ring truest for Hamlet. Since he unpacks his heart with words in that moment, Hamlet views this aspect of his identity as unquestionable and unavoidable. Turning from his more rational focus on the widow Hecuba, his association with a whore is less logical in the midst of his emotional breakdown. Ironically, the passionate, feminized breakdown in section three flows instantly into the resolute, plotting section of the speech with a caesura: “—Hum, I have heard / That guilty creatures sitting at a play . . .” (617-18). To conclude the soliloquy, Hamlet spends twenty-odd lines scheming to “catch the conscience of the King” through the production of a play—words moving toward action (634). Hamlet’s self-assessment as a whore frees him and leads him to a more renewed purpose in order to *act* like Gertrude. It is a step not towards murder, importantly, but towards a logical examination of what the Ghost told him. And so, in the process of searching the ruins of his mental Ilium like Hecuba, Hamlet resolutely desires to embrace his identity as a revenger like Pyrrhus, but only if he can witness some sort of physical evidence in support of his cause. In other words, through the heart of a whore, Hamlet pursues the sight of the widow.



## **Conclusion**

I contend that Hamlet's grief, doubt, and isolation help him find freedom in mourning females, but tragedy's genre conventions and cultural restrictions of what is "manly" eventually win in the end. Our titular hero who shames his actively cold mother with Niobe's tears and sits mesmerized by Hecuba's wailing becomes Gertrude by the play's end, or the prostitute who acts and speaks without genuine emotion or feeling. These grieving women find agency in their emotional expression while Hamlet ends up imprisoned by words and killed by action. The mourning females, Niobe and Hecuba, act as subtle judges of Shakespeare's tragedy, condemning the melancholy prince who chooses the wrong, masculine course of action and becomes his emotionless mother.

## CHAPTER III

### **“BY SELF-EXPERIENCE TAUGHT”: GENDER, GRIEF, AND PERFORMANCE IN *THE TRAGEDY OF MARIAM***

In Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam*, there is no lack of grieving women, yet their complex emotional states are rarely consistent with early modern feminizations of grief. For Cary, female grief does not always indicate outright agency; the power of this emotion is found in how her female characters respond to grief (sometimes the women explicitly talk back to it). For instance, Mariam is impassioned by her grief and equates it with her sexuality, Alexandra is justified by her own maternal grief but shames Mariam’s “widowed eye,” and Salome rejects the existence of grief completely—confused by its lack of male-centered power (1.1.70). Through a myriad of loquacious female characters, Cary shapes a progressive view of female grief in this Jewish historical context, situating subversive female behavior in a conventional, traditional world.

Reflective of Cary’s own Post-Reformation England, Cary’s well-crafted females (Mariam, Alexandra, Salome, Graphina, and Doris) offer us distinct views of grief as well as contrasting emotions: choler, envy, and lust. Unfortunately, these emotionally-progressive women become distorted through the prism of the male gaze: Mariam through Herod’s objectification/love-melancholy; Alexandra through Nuntio’s report; Salome through Constabarus’ hate, Silleus’ love, and Pheroras’ judgment; and Graphina through Pheroras’ love. While discussing “closeted authority” in Cary’s play, Miranda Garno Nesler clarifies that “Because patriarchal judgment relies on the ability to read a woman’s behavior, her body must be available as a text; her private, interior actions are only important if her public behavior verifies them” (363). In this chapter, I focus on three of Cary’s women—Mariam, Alexandra,

and Salome—who exert a powerful awareness of themselves as readable texts performing for a male audience. Throughout most of Cary’s play, these women navigate events in relation to (and through) the more powerful men around them, unfortunately echoing the male-dominated Denmark in which we studied Niobe, Hecuba, and Gertrude. However, Cary inserts “a poetics of mourning” into the play, creating for Mariam a feminine interiority and privacy, befitting a closet drama’s more private nature as a dramatic genre than was allowed for the women in Shakespeare’s public, performed tragedy (Hodgson 4).

In act one’s first five scenes, Cary presents readers with a rare glimpse into an all-female dramatic world, an imagined narrative similar to an early modern “closet” where we are privileged to see women express themselves in relation to other women. Nesler elucidates, “Closet drama was a particularly powerful vehicle for female expression because it had a reputation for falling safely within proper household boundaries” (365). When reading aloud closet dramas, often women performed these texts with other women, largely freed from male supervision and disruption (Nesler 368). Margaret Cavendish’s preface to her *Playes* (1662) explains to her readership the role of performance in a closet drama: “[Readers] must not read a Scene as they would a Chapter; for Scenes must be read as if they were spoke or Acted ... the very sound of the Voice that enters through the Ears, doth present the Actions to the Eyes of Fancy as lively as if it were really Acted” (Findlay 9). Thus, for the tragedy’s characters and readership, many women were able to read fellow women as “texts” in domestic, yet performative spaces. Due to this largely female-populated private domain, male anxieties abounded. Men sought to limit women’s activities in the public sphere, but they were threatened by the female privacy that such an isolated space as a “closet” allowed (Nesler 366). In a culture

where young boys played female characters on the stage, Cary's closet drama enabled her female readers to embody progressive female roles in private.

I argue that in act one of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, Cary purposefully constructs a closet-like, all-female world to explore the secret agency of women acting among women. Alexandria Bennett notes the “multiple layers of gender and discourse” present in this play “as a woman writes a woman speaking about women speaking”; Bennett argues that it is “a forcible reminder of the ideal of female silence advocated by contemporary manuals of conduct, and the difficulty which women could have in voicing their views” (299). Through the play's meta-layers, Cary boldly and provocatively makes Mariam a “public voice” in a play published amidst a sea of misogynistic publications aimed to bridle women's tongues (Kennedy 1). Henry Smith, one of these early modern misogynist contributors, claims that “for the ornamet of a woman is silence. . . . As the open vessels were counted uncleane; so account that the open mouth hath much uncleannes” (*A Preparative to Marriage*, 1598, 1630). Here, Smith reduces a woman's mouth to that of a common household container in order to perpetuate the triteness of the female voice and male ownership of that voice. In Cary's culture, women's tongues most significantly influenced women's reputations aside from their sexual purity. Ironically, Smith overlooks the fact that if a vessel were never opened it would never serve its intended purpose; a tongue, like a vessel, is meant to be used. However, Cary's radical-speaking woman, Mariam, is softened by the fact that Cary is merely retelling history, deflecting the blame onto her historical source, Thomas Lodge's translation of Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* (1602). Sandra K. Fischer refers to Cary's clever tactic as an example of “genres of marginality,” when an author reports on factual events and is “not obliged to accept responsibility for what may be considered rebellious notions” (228). Rather than Cary shirking her responsibility for her controversial female characters, Cary—

similar to Graphina and Alexandra who safely navigate Herod's world—publishes a radical play in a skillfully subtle fashion, avoiding the public punishment that befalls her heroine.

Cary's women-only opening activates the narrative with a solitary and grieving Mariam in scene one, her angry, vengeful mother Alexandra in scene two, an evil, jealous, and conniving Salome in scene three, and Salome's masculine defense of her infidelity to her husband in scene four. Each woman gets her own scene to express herself without a single male presence. By analyzing Mariam's soliloquy and her grief, Alexandra's anger and rebuke of her daughter's emotions, and Salome's unfeminine hatred toward Mariam, I argue that this exclusively female segue into the tragedy frames the entire drama, drawing a line in the sand between a male-free world of women as interior, emotional beings and a male-invaded narrative that distorts—but does not eradicate—female expression. Following the intrusion of male characters, Cary's complex and outspoken females are slowly converted, intensified, and/or simplified into male-appropriated versions of themselves. I argue that Cary intended for the results of this male-caused degradation to be tragic, yet emblematic of a past/present patriarchal culture that refuses women emotional interiority and, therefore, autonomy through expression.

Before Mariam initiates the drama, Cary provides her readers with "The Argument" section, the quarto's paratext that provides the narrative's backstory and overview. The Argument objectively situates the reader in the drama's events, preparing us for the anxieties we find in Mariam's opening speech. Mariam, "the daughter of Hyrcanus, the rightful king and priest," married Herod, "an Idumaeon," because he had gained "the favour of the Romans into the Jewish monarchy" (Cary 1-5). Mariam's brother Aristobolus and grandfather, Hyrcanus, were threats to Herod's power, so "he charged the second with treason and put him to death, and drowned the first under colour of sport" (11-12). The killing of these men devastated Alexandra,

Mariam's mother, and she "accused him for their deaths before Antony" (13). Alexandra, as a grieving, passionate mother, resumes our discussion of maternal grief (or lack thereof) with *Hamlet's* Gertrude and Niobe. Some time later, Herod traveled to Rome upon the news that Caesar had overthrown Antony, Herod's ally, to negotiate peace under Caesar as his new ruler. However, "news came to Jerusalem that Caesar had put [Herod] to death" (31-2). Prior to his departure, Herod had commanded Sohemus to kill his wife, Mariam, if Herod were slain. Herod's "violent affection" for Mariam reveals his extreme love-melancholy state, causing him to desire her death "(unwilling any should enjoy her after him)" (18-19). Upon the news of Herod's supposed death, Sohemus chose *not* to fulfill Herod's "strict and private commandment," and instead revealed to Mariam Herod's selfish command to kill her (19). Consequently, when act one begins, we find Mariam emotionally distraught: she is attempting to process her husband's death, the betraying news of his command to kill her, and her conflicting loyalties to him as her husband and to her slain family.

### **Mariam's Masculine/Feminine Grief**

In 1.1, Mariam's soliloquy initiates the dramatic action with sporadic rhetorical and mood shifts that disorient the reader as much as they illuminate Mariam's inner turmoil. Her soliloquy performs "a vague but persistent anxiety over excessive grief" immediately following "The Argument" section (Hodgson 8). Mariam begins by considering herself the equal of a man, then performing the conventions of her female gender while using self-deprecating humor. From the outset, Cary introduces Mariam as a nuanced figure, placing her among early modern drama's great titular characters. While Cary's tragedy is a closet drama, the stage direction "[Enter] Mariam" or Q's "*Mariam sola*" dramatizes a lonely woman on a barren stage—silent and

commanding in her solitude. Her female voice may serve as Cary's "dangerous" authorial ink, tainting the page's whiteness (Hopkins 148):

How oft have I with public voice run on  
To censure Rome's last hero for deceit  
Because he wept when Pompey's life was gone,  
Yet when he lived, he thought his name too great?  
But now I do recant, and, Roman lord,  
Excuse too rash a judgement in a woman.  
My sex pleads pardon; pardon then afford;  
Mistaking is with us but too too common. (1.1.1-5)

From the outset, Mariam associates herself "with public voice," setting "herself against the early modern commonplace of the ideal woman who accepted the imperative to cultivate silence" (Wray 1 f.n.). Often, scholars focus on this aspect of Mariam's character, comparing her, "the speaking woman," to Cary as "the writing woman" in a culture that did not approve of either. However, I want to allow for the possibility that Cary does not identify exclusively with any one of her female characters. In her introduction to the Arden edition of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, Ramona Wray discusses scholars' abnormal obsession with biographical readings of Cary's work, from overly contextualizing the play to postulating about her marriage based on Herod's and Mariam's relationship. While I see merit in the tendency to compare Mariam's "frank speech" to Cary's anxieties about her culture, I divert from this well-trodden path and focus instead on how feminine grief and choler speak where words cannot, emotions that undermine cultural norms so subtly that even Cary's male readership allowed its publication. To clarify my methodology, I reference Cary's historical context throughout my analysis without making claims about Cary as an individual woman in a biographical sense.

Before grief's sobering presence enters her speech, Mariam introduces herself as a rebellious, mannish speaking figure. Similar to Hamlet who compares himself to grieving women, Mariam also chooses the opposite sex to identify with in her grief: "To censure Rome's

last hero for deceit / Because he wept when Pompey's life was gone" (1.1.2-3). Julius Caesar was "Rome's last hero" who "wept" at his sworn enemy's death when he saw Pompey the Great's severed head (Plutarch 555). Like Caesar, Mariam grieves a sworn enemy's death, her vicious husband's; but as Mariam later explains, she struggles with affection for Herod as her wooer and lover. Rather than feminizing her grief like Hamlet does, Mariam turns to a powerful grieving man in a slightly similar situation to hers, claiming for herself equality with a male through the catalyst of her convoluted emotions. While Hamlet shames himself by alluding to grieving women, Mariam glorifies her complicated sorrow by associating it with a conqueror and supreme world ruler. In this way, Cary shows how grief can subtly transgress acceptable boundaries for women, deftly transforming feminine grief into masculine power.

Following her allusion to Julius Caesar, Mariam surprisingly flips her gendered mask from male-like griever to apologetic, inferior woman with the first of six "But" refrains (1.1.5, 12, 27, 31, 61, 75). Mariam rhetorically addresses Julius Caesar in her soliloquy, "*But now* I do recant, and, Roman lord, / Excuse too rash a judgement in a woman" (1.1.5-6, f.n. emphasis mine). Mariam's first "But now" reverts her rebellious assertion that she is equal to Caesar in her grief, transposing her from the near past to the present moment in which Mariam feels compelled to ask for forgiveness. Throughout her play, Cary creates a complicated relationship between Jewish history and how it speaks to the early modern period, influencing what Mariam may mean by her multiple "But now's." Lisa Hopkins elaborates on the tension between the Jewish historical setting and Cary's present moment, stating, "Questions of origins lie at the heart of the story" (154-55). Hopkins argues that there are two histories Cary wishes to engage in this tragedy, classical and Christian, setting up a "competition between myths of origin" (153). Hopkins observes, "The two traditions encourage the reader to be acutely aware . . . of the



continuing pressures exerted on the present by history” (153). Mariam may idealize some fictionalized past where she can equate herself with a man through grief, *but now...but now* Mariam must feel sorry for her “rash judgement” (1.1.5). She must apologize on behalf of her entire sex: “My sex pleads pardon; pardon then afford; / Mistaking is with us but too too common” (1.1.6-7). In the first eight lines of the play, we are presented with polarized views of Mariam as masculine *and* feminine. Cary uses this polarization to frame her expression of grief that follows, removing the rigid boundaries of femininity.

Since Cary presents us with a more nuanced perspective on gendered grief than Shakespeare does with Hamlet’s mourning, Judith Butler may help us unpack Mariam’s progressive gender performance. While framing their book’s approach to performed maternity in Renaissance drama, Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson lucidly explain Butler’s theoretical approach to gender: “Butler... contends that gender must be considered ‘as a corporeal style, an ‘act’, as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (3). Butler herself argues: “The action of gender requires a performance that is repeated” (519). When Mariam masculinizes her grief and then immediately feminizes herself by apologizing for the act, Mariam constructs the “meaning” of grief for herself. Mariam’s intentional construction of her gendered grief transcends the socially-sanctioned grief of Shakespeare’s Niobe and Hecuba. Butler argues that gender is a repeated and public performance, but in these first five scenes, Cary frees her female characters to perform gender in relation to other females.

In this instance with Mariam’s opening soliloquy, Mariam is by herself, performing not to satisfy patriarchal conventions of feminine grief or even for other women, but for the sake of “disruptive play” (Diamond). Elin Diamond describes gender as “both a thing doing – a

performance that puts conventional gender attributes into possibly disruptive play – and a thing done, – a preexisting oppressive category” (3). The remarkable point here is that Cary accomplishes Mariam’s gender performativity without being obvious about it, because that would indeed be “dangerous” as Hopkins notes for an early modern female author (149). Through the medium of grief, Cary dilutes the potency of Mariam’s rebellion, beginning her drama with subversive gender play without turning the heads of male readers who are already anxious to control female behavior. Such fluid, transgressive play demonstrates the threatening freedom of female emotions without patriarchal control (Diamond). If we frame Mariam’s femininity as “a thing doing,” an action she chooses, the way in which she grieves can no longer be assumed to be conventional or necessarily feminine.

### **Grief as “Self-experience”**

The rest of Mariam’s opening monologue addresses her question: “Then why grieves Mariam Herod’s death to hear?” (1.1.38). It is a legitimate question, especially considering the back-and-forth nature of Mariam’s emotions. Regarding early modern grief, Elizabeth Hodgson argues for “an anxious bond between the forgettable dead and the voice of the living mourner who may be implicated in the same oblivion” (1). Due to the fresh news of Herod’s death, the entire play lies in this mourning “oblivion,” with Mariam as Herod’s main “living mourner” (1). Hodgson examines the early modern theological change from a Catholic Purgatory that helped mourners cope with the death of a loved one to the Reformist’s removal of that comforting in-between space. In so doing, Hodgson suggests that this drastic change in how early moderns were told to view death created an obsession with grief and loss: “sophisticated literary output is overwhelmingly concerned with sorrow, lamentation, loss, tears, mourning, and absence” (4). Hodgson goes on to say: “This shift of energy from the dead to the living remnant meant that

mourning as well as death became, not only in theological ways but in many others as well, increasingly a site of similar social anxiety” (2). The social anxiety manifests itself here with Mariam, a dangerous speaking woman, feeling two powerfully contradictory emotions at once. She rejoices in Herod’s death as a murderer and reluctantly grieves due to their intimate connection as husband and wife. Mariam’s convoluted emotions may emit from “[t]his shift of energy from the dead to the living remnant” (2). Energized by Herod’s death, Mariam serves as our guide through the play’s oblivion of mourning, embodying the instability and confusion of grief.

Yet, Herod, as the falsified dead, is not completely absent in the first five scenes, but exists as the cause of Mariam’s emotional display, testing my overarching argument for an all-female closeted world (1.1.27). In favor of this argument, a handful of scholars have commented on the exclusive female cast in the first five scenes. These include Boyd Berry and Jeane Roberts, who suggest “that the first two acts imagine or wish for a Utopian absence of patriarchy” (Berry 259). While Berry substantiates Roberts’ argument that the first act “presents women acting as if freed from patriarchy,” I must partly disagree in light of Herod’s centrality in Mariam’s thoughts (Berry 259). The first five scenes are not “Utopian,” as these scholars argue, but plagued with ideas of men and the patriarchal conventions that still restrict them. Even when they are physically separated from any male presence, these women show the inescapable feeling that early modern women may have felt about male control. The action verb “wish” that Berry uses is quite appropriate for Cary’s women in the context of Mariam’s soliloquy when Mariam lists three desires in three lines with the repeating words “Oft have I wished” (1.1.15, 16, 17). Mariam wishes that she were freed from Herod, that “he might lose his breath,” and that she would see “his carcass dead” (1.1.15, 16, 17). Here, Mariam expresses her past feelings of helplessness in

the repeated, weak-willed word “wish.” She also connects her grief with her intense hatred for Herod just as she later associates her grief with sex. The humoral divisions between the different emotions collapse in Mariam’s interior play, and Mariam’s intense “wish” for Herod’s death fosters an environment of mourning as opposed to a male-free Utopia.

In her soliloquy, Mariam fights against the pressures of male containment and marital duty, doing so individualistically and not based on some “thing done—a preexisting oppressive category” (Diamond 3). Mariam shifts from apologizing for her sex to her own, distinctive perspective: “Now do I find, by self-experience taught, / One object yields both grief and joy” (1.1.9-10). The feminine agency in this line is powerful when spoken in an early modern culture where every aspect of women’s conduct was proscribed by male authors in “anatomies, conduct and domestic handbooks, sermons, homilies, ballads, catechisms, and court cases” (Newman xx). Karen Newman puts it pointedly: “the male voice instructs (from *struere*, to build) femininity” (6). While the notion of femininity itself is prescriptive, Mariam’s “self-experience” frees her, if only for a few lines, from this male construction of womanhood. It is Mariam’s unique experience that teaches her, portraying a level of confidence that Hamlet never expresses in his wrestling bouts with grief. Mariam concludes on her own that “One object yields both grief and joy”; she embraces emotional paradox without apology (1.1.10).

The next fifteen lines flow from Mariam’s “grief and joy” over Herod killing her family (“Then rage and scorn had put my love to flight”), her acknowledgement that his love for her was genuine (“Hate hid his true affection from my sight”), and her sexual fidelity to Herod (“But yet too chaste a scholar was my heart / To learn to love another than my lord”) (1.1.18, 21, 27-28). At first glance, the emotional war bursting from Mariam’s consciousness seems unnecessary. If she hates her husband for killing her family, why does this “object” yield “joy”

as well as “grief” (1.1.9)? The line itself devalues Herod by calling him a literal “object,” foreshadowing the objectification Mariam suffers from Herod later on. The answer for Mariam’s strange grief derives not from marital obligation but from their marital bed:

But now his death to memory doth call  
The *tender love* that he to Mariam bare,  
And mine to him; this makes those rivers fall,  
Which by another thought *unmoistened* are. (1.1.31-34, emphasis mine)

In this instance, humoural language sexualizes Mariam’s grief. Mariam confesses to herself that she remembers the “tender love” he bore her, distinct from the purely emotional expression, “true affection,” she uses earlier to describe Herod’s feelings. Mariam’s sex-reference stems from her discussion right before this passage of “ranging” or infidelity, which alludes to sexual promiscuity (1.1.26). Mariam does not mourn Herod’s death out of some male misogynistic prescription of wifely obligation, but because Herod was a true, satisfactory lover. Their mutual sexual enjoyment is what “makes those rivers fall” from her “widowed eyes” (1.1.33). Mariam even goes on to use a sexually-charged and humoural word to explain the complicated nature of her memories: “Which by another thought *unmoistened* are” (1.1.34, emphasis mine). Olivia Weisser remarks: “In early modern England, women’s bodies were thought to be physically wetter and colder than men’s, a composition that enabled reproduction but also made women more susceptible to the power of emotions” (261). Weisser goes on to connect women’s perceived bodily makeup to their emotional vulnerability, particularly grief: women’s “spongy, open bodies required a continual emission of fluids by means of lactation and menstruation, as well as tears” (261). As I have argued earlier, the link between lactation, menstruation, and tears places tears in the company of highly sexual and feminized secretions. In this instance, the word *moisten* may carry with it multiple meanings for Mariam. The covert rebellion evidenced here in Mariam’s “self-experience” is not that she disregards the notion of wifhood or femininity, but

that she redefines them: a wife can hate (rightfully judge her husband's actions), a wife can speak publically, and a wife can enjoy sex with her husband for more than procreation and still retain her character (Spelman 163).

### **Male/Female "Objects"**

Following Mariam's presence for three scenes in act one, she disappears until the end of act three upon the news that Herod is alive. The tragedy is now invaded by men, and by the time her beheading rolls around, Mariam has been transformed and recuperated to a more acceptable version of herself. In Mariam's case, her "recuperation" to patriarchal societal conventions begins when Herod returns and rhetorically reduces Mariam to merely "half" of himself, from a mature, complex person into his "best and dearest half!" (4.3.2). As with other cultural examples that degrade women, Cary shows Herod's affection for his wife to demonstrate how corrupted and manipulated a male-centered marriage can become.

For the men in this play, women's personalities and character are merely objects to enjoy or to inspire some other pleasant emotion. Pheroras, Herod's brother, explains the male outlook in the drama when he speaks of his love interest Graphina's attributes: "Mine eye found loveliness, mine ear found wit, / To please the one and to enchant the other" (3.1.15-16). When the woman's emotion shifts from bringing a man joy to wrath, for instance, the woman must change herself or die. By retreating to inward reflection, Mariam bravely rejects Herod's objectification, refusing to give him joy upon his return: "My lord, I suit my garment to my mind, / And there no cheerful colours can I find" (4.3.5-6). Reminiscent of Hamlet's "nighted color," Mariam seeks to match externally her internal grief with dark clothing, displeasing her husband who wants "loveliness" like Pheroras does of Graphina (1.2.68) (3.1.15). Herod responds by pretending to desire Mariam's happiness, asking her as a dutiful husband what he

can do to make her happy and forgive him. Unconvinced, Mariam strips Herod's deceptive words down to his cruel actions:

Your offers to my heart no ease can grant,  
Except they could my brother's life restore.  
No, had you wished the wretched Mariam glad,  
Or had your love to her been truly tied –  
Nay, had you not desire to make her sad –  
My brother nor my grandsire had not died. (4.3.25-30)

While Mariam suits her outward actions to her inward mind, she attacks the legitimacy of Herod's words, proving his actions do not support them.

Mariam's un-wifely response to Herod may compare to Cordelia's un-daughterly response to Lear in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, revealing how early modern pressures upon wives and daughters transcend Cary's and Shakespeare's dramatic historical contexts. In Cary's play, Mariam and Herod's argument continues with Herod begging Mariam to love him for the sake of his passionate love for her and forget the small part about him murdering her family. When Herod realizes that Mariam will not be moved to "smile" to satisfy his desires, he retaliates with a threat: "This froward humour will not do you good" (4.3.57, 54). Mariam refuses to smile for him and finds power in her inward grief, stating "I cannot frame disguise, nor never taught / My face a look dissenting from my thought" (4.3.60). Here, Mariam embodies autonomy through genuine self-expression, demonstrating "the growing acceptance of a view of emotions as private property" (Kennedy 3). Mariam alone has "privileged access" to her thoughts and emotions, maintaining control even when Herod attempts to extend his dominion there (Scheman 179). Mariam's refusal to deceive with words brings to mind the "young" and "true" Cordelia's response to her father in *King Lear* (1605): "Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth" (1.1.91-92). Lear, desiring for Cordelia's wit to please and honor him before bestowing her with her dowry, retorts, "How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little"

(1.1.87). When women do not speak and act in accordance with the men around them, they are ordered to change their inward states. But both Cordelia and Mariam stand firm in their rebellious interiority, refusing to be “half” of someone else and receiving horrible ends as a result (Cordelia hung and Mariam beheaded).

Ironically, Cordelia’s and Mariam’s stoic responses and mastery of their emotions during these altercations with Lear and Herod effeminize the men by making them lose control of *their* emotions. In her monograph on early modern women and anger, Gwynne Kennedy argues that early moderns aimed for a “mastery of the passions,” viewing “excessive emotion” as “effeminizing for men and quintessentially feminine for women of the period” (5). Pervasive in various genres of early modern writing, the passions were overtly feminized, seen in Thomas Lodge’s epigraph of his translation of Seneca’s essay *De Ira (Of Anger)*: “How farre is it for thee that thou shouldest surmount *her*, then that *she* should be *Mistresse* of thee?” (Seneca emphasis mine). Lodge refers to anger here as a woman, and Kennedy explains how early modern men gendered the emotions female to show their “superiority to women” and to “naturalize [women] by aligning [them] with emotional self-control” (1). For early moderns, male emotional self-control and containment were closely related to male dominance and control of women. By Mariam and Cordelia refusing their “wifely [or daughterly] duty—subjection, obedience, silence,” they turn the tables on Herod and Lear, exhibiting agency and control over their own emotions and over the men themselves (Newman 9). Infuriated by Mariam’s refusal to greet him warmly with a smile, Herod exclaims, “By heaven, you vex me! Build not on my love” (4.3.61). Calmly, Mariam exercises her wit not to “enchant” as Graphina’s wit does for Pheroras but to inflame Herod’s rage: “I will not build on so unstable ground” (4.3.62). Mariam shames Herod by refusing to bend to his will (showing the limits of his power when it comes to her inward



emotions) and showing him the instability of his own emotions. Like Cordelia, Mariam overturns the feminine stereotype of instability and rashness onto the masculine power. In the only physical meeting between Herod and Mariam, Herod realizes that he cannot gain control over his wife's emotions, so he must regain authority by removing the female threat.

However, Herod's decision to kill Mariam is far from calculated or based on sound judgment. At the play's end, Salome, Herod's sister, corrupts his mind and convinces him to order Mariam's beheading out of his obsessive love-melancholy and jealousy (under the assumption that Mariam and Sohemus were involved). Herod does not attend the beheading due to his encroaching madness; as the male power, he does not know what to do with himself upon his wife rejecting him and falls into despair. Cary spends much of the last act focusing on Herod's madness to highlight the devastation powerful, emotive women can cause. Akin to Herod's "posthumous" emotional effect on Mariam at the play's start, truly Mariam gets her retrospective revenge at the play's end. In Act Five, Nuntio reports to the mad Herod Mariam's last moments: "She made no answer, but she looked the while / As if thereof she scarce did notice take, / Yet smiled—a dutiful, though scornful smile" (5.1.50-52). Cary, through Nuntio, uses two clashing adjectives to describe Mariam's last act of expression: "dutiful" and "scornful" (5.1.52). "Dutiful" signifies what she *should* do, the action of obeying Herod as her authority, and "scornful" represents Mariam's interiority, her contempt, or "mental attitude" (*OED*). Often a titular character's last moments reveal the crux (the overarching anxiety) of the narrative. Hamlet's last words, "The rest is silence," accomplishes his greatest fear of death, that of flying to "places we know not of," as he ruminates in an earlier soliloquy (*Hamlet* 5.2.342, 3.1.81). Mariam smiles dutifully as a wife and obeys Herod's earlier command to "smile." Her submissive expression is weakened even through interpretation—told to us by a man, Nuntio, to

Herod, who has won, if there be any winning in tragedy (4.3.57). Yet, Mariam smiles scornfully and retains the boundaries of her autonomy; Herod never could quite reach Mariam's interiority, her genuine grief and contempt over her husband as a murderer. Because of Mariam's scorn, Herod physically performs the act of objectification through dissection, as Nuntio reports succinctly: "Her body is divided from her head" (5.1.90). The narrative ends with Mariam as two objects, a head and a torso, mitigated through male judgment and no longer threatening.

### **Alexandra: "That incensed queen"**

Returning to act one, we can trace the trajectory (and quite different end) of another powerful female: Alexandra. Cary complicates early modern notions of feminine emotion by endowing Alexandra, Mariam's mother, with masculine anger and hate while limiting female agency through mother-daughter disunity. Scene two begins with Alexandra fanning Mariam's hate and shaming Mariam's wifely love for Herod. Hardly maternal, Alexandra's first words to her grieving daughter are "What means these tears?" (1.2.1). Reminiscent of Gertrude, Hamlet's "cold mother," Alexandra does not perform the expected maternal duty of comforting her child in her grief; instead, she chastises Mariam for her outward show of genuine feeling: "What? Weep'st thou for thy brother's murderer's / sake?" (Shakespeare 1.2.77) (Cary 1.1.3-4). In both *Hamlet* and *The Tragedy of Mariam*, grief expressed through tears is never welcomed or praised by the maternal figure. Moncrief and McPherson explain that early modern dramas "both reforc[e] and redefine[e] prevalent cultural assumptions about women and women as mothers" (6). In tragic narratives, playwrights would most often question and test the assumption of women as loving mothers, a core element of a properly functioning patriarchal system. Moncrief and McPherson also mention that many early modern playwrights, including Shakespeare, "constructed dramatized versions of maternal behavior that relied on a careful combination of

compliant and disruptive motherhood” (6). Participating in the trend, Cary relies on the “compliant and disruptive” mother formula in *Alexandra*, challenging societal assumptions about women as mothers without devaluing motherhood itself.

In *Hamlet*, for example, Shakespeare degrades motherhood; Gertrude shames her son’s grieving because it casts a pall over her wedding and indirectly accuses her of emotional sterility. Cary does not shame motherhood; Alexandra scolds her daughter’s wifely tears because Alexandra believes her daughter has misplaced her female identity. For Alexandra, the role of mother trumps the role of wife, preferring her more powerful feminine role to Mariam’s male-centered role. Conversely, *Hamlet*’s Gertrude identifies herself most strongly with Claudius as his wife, choosing marriage over widowhood and the pleasures of her marital bed over familial mourning with her son. Similarly, Alexandra denies the natural bond with her daughter, Mariam, but not out of wifely duty—as a wronged mother. Alexandra dismisses Mariam’s widow-grief as *less* important to her womanhood than her maternal need for justice. Cary crafts two complex women who seek the same end through different means: Mariam desires autonomy through words and grief, and Alexandra pursues agency through anger and action. As the end of the play elucidates, Alexandra’s strategy is more successful (and safer) in a man’s world.

From the outset, Cary casts Alexandra as more dominant in her hatred than Mariam in her grief. Anticipating her mother’s disapproval, Mariam frantically commands her tears to do the impossible and return to her eyes upon her mother’s approach:

But, tears, fly back, and hide you in your banks!  
You must not be to Alexandra seen;  
For if my moan be spied, but little thanks  
Shall Mariam have from that incensed queen? (1.1.75-78)

Often, Cary makes her characters attempt to control their emotions by talking back to them, but they are always feeble attempts, exposing the inevitability of emotions and their power to control

their bearer. In Mariam's case, grief overcomes her and submits her to Alexandra, her maternal authority. The title Cary gives Alexandra, "that incensed queen," rivals Shakespeare's feminine titles in *Hamlet*: Gertrude the "cold mother" and Hecuba the "mobled queen" (1.2.77, 2.2.440). Seen in these introductory titles, there is an inherent power in motherhood from which early modern playwrights often draw (Wayne). For Alexandra, the word "incensed" means literally to "set on fire" and figuratively to "kindle" or "excite," "inflamed with wrath" and "enraged" (*OED*). Furthermore, "incensed" was used of "an animal depicted with fire issuing from the mouth and ears" (*OED*). Based on this definition, Cary characterizes Alexandra as potentially both an animal and a man. In early modern texts, the word "incensed" is most often used to describe enraged men, including Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1597) about "incensed peers," Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) describing "Th' incensed Father, and th' incensed Son," and J. Scott's *Christian Life: Part II* (1686) involving an "incensed Judge" (Shakespeare 2.1.52) (Milton 5.847) (Scott 7.533). In most cases, "incensed" carries with it a tone of authority, power, and maleness, masculinizing Alexandra as Gertrude's lack of emotion does for her. Importantly in their initial greeting, it is Mariam's and Alexandra's emotions that divide them, rather than Herod's posthumous male presence, as other scholars have argued.

Alexandra as an incensed animal echoes late in the play, showing the two-sided nature of the word "incensed" as both empowering and demeaning. In act four, Constabarus and Babas's sons (subplot characters in the play) animalize women for a good eighty lines before their death, perhaps because they feel emotionally stifled and envious of the more emotionally expressive women in the play ("But yet it grieves me with a grief *untold*," as one of Babas's sons laments) (4.6.6, emphasis mine). Constabarus, Salome's cuckolded husband, joins in the sons' bitter hatred of women, focusing on the alleged falsehood of feminine grief:

Tear-massacring hyenas! Nay, far worse,  
For they for prey do shed their feigned tears,  
But you will weep – you creatures cross to good –  
For your unquenched thirst of human blood.  
You were the angels cast from heaven for pride,  
And still do keep your angels' outward show,  
But none of you are inly beautified,  
For still your heaven-depriving pride doth grow. (4.6.39-46)

In light of this passage, Alexandra is “that incensed queen” who satisfies this male view.

However, Constabarus exhibits a striking lack of originality here. Constabarus pulls from misogynistic clichés and stereotypes of the period to bash women in generalized terms. Hyenas were known for “subtlety and deceit,” and women were often associated with angelic beauty and devilish hearts (4.6.39 f.n.). Through a subplot, Cary appears to go out of her way to insert a well-known sexist argument against women, but for a purpose. The argument's lack of originality reads as poor writing and therefore as less convincing than Alexandra's impressive, justified anger in act one.

While Mariam associates herself with emotional confusion in act one, Alexandra inflames scene two with her potent hatred and anger towards Herod, the murderer of her son and father. Alexandra reminds her daughter of all that Herod has done:

He ever thirsts for blood, and blood is red.  
Weep'st thou because his love to thee was bent?  
And read'st thou love in crimson characters?  
Slew he thy friends to work thy heart's content?  
No. Hate may justly call that action hers. (1.2.28-32)

Alexandra attacks Mariam's grief by showing her that it is ill-founded; it is illogical to love a man that murders your own flesh and blood. Mariam contradicts her mother's logic and loves him anyway, isolating herself as tragic titular characters often do. During Alexandra's argument, she makes “Hate” a woman: “Hate may justly call that action *hers*” (1.2.32, emphasis mine).

Even as emotions were often metaphors for women, hate (a word closely related to masculine

action) was rarely feminized as it is here (*OED*). Alexandra condemns Herod as a murderer while simultaneously justifying her own personal embodiment of “hate” by making it female.

With Alexandra’s logical wrath as the “incensed queen” in act one, Cary employs misogynistic stereotypes and gender conventions only to turn them on their heads. Before Herod returns, Alexandra is not animalistic at all but reasonable in her argument against him. Alexandra never tells Mariam something that is untrue about her murderous husband. Alexandra is not stereotyped as a “hyena” until the men enter the tragedy. Alexandra lives in both worlds—the all-female world where she can be feminine as a wronged mother, masculine in her desire for revenge, and reasonable in her argument *and* the male-invaded world where she is a “hyena” who, at the end of the play, renounces her daughter publically. Cary juxtaposes Alexandra and Mariam as complex, autonomous women in the first five scenes and as distorted versions of themselves by the play’s end to show the inconsistency in misogyny: Alexandra is neither a hyena, an angel, or a demon, but an adaptable woman who chooses to survive in Herod’s world.

As an enigmatic mother, Alexandra confounds us in her last reported moments of the play when she publically renounces her daughter and praises Herod. Similar to her daughter, Alexandra exists physically only once in act one and disappears until the end when she is misappropriated through Herod’s servant’s report. When Mariam awaits her impending public execution, Nuntio, Herod’s servant, describes the curious event:

But as she came she Alexandra met,  
Who did her death – sweet queen – no whit bewail,  
But, as if nature she did quite forget,  
She did upon her daughter loudly rail.  
.....  
She told her that her death was too too good,  
And that already she had lived too long.  
She said, she shamed to have a part in blood  
Of her that did the princely Herod wrong. (5.1.33-44)

From powerful “incensed queen” to insulted “sweet queen,” Alexandra is stripped bare of her righteous anger and maternal power. This report is perhaps the most tragic scene of the play, and the most befuddling upon reading it. Why would Alexandra, who hates Herod with a passion and desires retribution in act one, reject her daughter in her last moments? It is the tragedy’s most heartless act, and it is undertaken by a woman rejecting another woman. In act one, Alexandra is unfiltered and autonomous. While she challenges the idea of motherhood, she does not outright reject it, serving as another example of subtle subversion when Cary upholds femininity while testing its boundaries. In act five, Alexandra is no longer speaking for herself, but she is talked *about* by a subordinate male servant, Nuntio. Through this male medium, Alexandra is an entirely different woman, fulfilling the role of a “tear-massacring hyena” in the most animalistic and degrading sense. In order to survive, Alexandra must reject her true emotions of hate and justice as revealed to us in act one and turn her hate to her own flesh and blood, her daughter. With this betrayal, Mariam is totally isolated and alone in her death, an authentic martyr for female expression; Alexandra ends the play as a male-appropriated hyena, but at least she is alive. Cary retains the tragedy in this moment through Nuntio’s insensitive sarcasm towards Alexandra as the “sweet queen,” showing the devastating result of a woman who must deny herself to survive. In Cary’s period, women often had to choose between authentic expression and their security in a patriarchal world; choosing the former cost Mariam her life.

While Cary’s progressive tragedy climaxes with Alexandra’s betrayal of her daughter, ultimately the feminine tension throughout the tragedy empowers each woman through difference. While few scholars focus on the rift between Alexandra and Mariam, they often comment on the bitter disunity between Doris and Mariam and Mariam and Salome, as Ayşe Naz Bulamur argues: “Instead of taking collective action to claim their legal rights, women support

male dominance by oppressing other women on the grounds of class, race, and feminine virtue” (3). When women interact with each other, there is no befriending but a clashing of position, race, morals, and ideals. Yet, Cary may intend such hostility for a positive purpose. If all of her female characters were the same, cutouts from the same stereotypical mold (as the men in this play wish them to be), there would be a satisfactory unity among the female sex and perhaps a kind of power there, but a power built on a male-simplified typecast. Instead, Cary creates five completely diverse women who do not get along, and while they lose power in their isolation, they also gain agency and freedom in their uniqueness.

### **Conclusion**

While the humoural perspective sets up a predictable “order,” Cary shows us the power of *difference* (4). Gail Kern Paster argues for “uniformity” in the humoural framework of emotions that “can be understood to occur because of the physical fact that bodies are composed and function in predictable, naturally limited ways” (4). Even though Paster agrees that “It would be naïve to argue that bodies at any given moment in a complex culture are understood socially or felt experientially in only *one* way,” she then goes on to focus only on the humoural body in relation to emotions (4). While Paster’s emphasis adds greatly to our understanding of early modern emotions in tragedy, Cary’s closet drama proves that there are countless “culturally available discourses” lying outside the physical realm (Paster 4). For example, Mariam’s melancholic state about her dead husband would mean nothing without memory, the interior recollection of experiencing her husband in the past. Morality (Mariam’s wifely duty), maternity (Alexandra’s love for her murdered son and rejection of Mariam as her daughter), and memory complicate this alleged “uniformity” in the body. Rather than writing a drama about women who overcome male patriarchy, Cary crafts a tragedy in which a grieving daughter and angered



mother navigate across multiple planes—moral (spiritual), social, and physical—through their emotions.

The originality in Cary's play is its subtle duality: Mariam's world vs. Herod's world. It is Cary's ability to subvert without overthrowing such valuable terms as femininity and masculinity. If there were nothing of value in maternity, we would not grieve Alexandra's betrayal of her daughter. If there were no difference between grief and hate, Alexandra and Mariam would have stood together against Herod. Cary maintains gendered emotional difference while challenging its bounds in a way that places her among the great male playwrights of her period. The very fact that we must still make this statement reveals that Herod's world is not so unlike our own. All of Cary's women and their distinct emotions deserve close attention, such as Doris's grief, Graphina's silence, and Salome's hate. For a larger project, the grief of Cary's other female characters would be ripe for analysis and would only serve to substantiate my argument that feminine grief (like any embodied emotion) functions within *and* transcends the humoral body, granting the griever agency in that transcendence. Paster argues, "Body parts are even imbued with their own affective capacity," as demonstrated when Mariam goes from empowered grieving woman to two objects (11). Within the body and without, Cary completes the tragedy appropriate to her genre: Mariam goes from complicated, rebellious, emotional woman to two (affective) objects, while Alexandra goes from passionate, angered mother to a spineless "hyena." Female emotive potentiality is juxtaposed with male-degraded stereotypes, and in that comparison, Cary prizes emotional difference over masculine power.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY

At the end, we arrive back at the beginning: women as grieving bodies, intellects, souls, and social subjects. Thanks to Herod, Mariam is a humoured, disjointed head and body. From Nuntio's report, Alexandra is a two-faced hyena. According to Hamlet, the unnamed prostitute is a masculine actor with no emotion. Revered by Hamlet, Hecuba is a bare-footed widow, grieving among the flames. Hamlet accuses Gertrude of being a sanguine, sex-crazed mother. And Niobe is a philosophical, Stoical mourner doomed because she dared to rise above a goddess on the social ladder. When filtered through the male gaze, women seem devoid of identity, simplified to male-appropriated versions of themselves. So, how does grief empower these early modern women as actual, embodied, complex people? Grief becomes powerful when we shift perspectives and go beyond misogynistic judgments, when we delve into Niobe's story *behind* Hamlet's rushed allusion or recognize the maternal pain in Alexandra's heart conveniently left out by Nuntio. As Cary accomplishes in her tragedy, when women are allowed to express themselves *for* themselves, they redefine, reframe, determine, and free up these historical frameworks of body, morality, faith, and society to make *feminine grief* whatever they need it to be—not whatever they're told it should be.

I approached this project with preconceived notions about early modern women, grief, and misogyny. And in the end, these women—Gertrude, Niobe, Hecuba, the unnamed prostitute, Mariam, and Alexandra—reveal how the words *feminine* and *grief* are more than the sum of their parts, how grief can be performed and obvious like Niobe's tears but also hidden in the heart like Alexandra's or the prostitute's. Early modern misogyny is not, at its root, the devaluation of

women, but actually the fear of women as capable emotional beings who feel, speak, and act in unpredictable and unrestrainable ways.

This project is only the starting point. At another time, in the catacombs of dissertation research perhaps, I will broaden my project to include the grieving-through-song Ophelia, expound on the cultural anxieties surrounding the masculine/witch-like Salome, and uncover the power in Graphina's silence. I plan to traverse the pages of other female playwrights, like Jane Lumley's translation of *Iphigeneia at Aulis* and Margaret Cavendish's closet drama, *Bell in Campo*, investigating how these playwrights employ emotion to empower and/or inhibit female expression, agency, and identity. I also intend to study Shakespeare's female grievers and strange mothers, like Tamora and Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* or Lady Anne Neville's grief and the Duchess of York's curse on her son in *Richard III*. Yet, these pursuits are for another time and another project; they offer further opportunities to observe how expressive and revolutionary women are as playwrights in tumultuous contexts and how early modern dramatic women use tears as weapons for autonomy and change.

In Chapter I of this thesis, I examined grief and women through humoural, Stoical, religious, and social paradigms. Chapter II focused on Hamlet as he takes center stage, embodying the masculine anxieties about grief while spotlighting the women in the tragedy. Through Hamlet, Shakespeare venerates Niobe and Hecuba in their feminine grief and feigned passivity, as well as condemning women in action like Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, and the prostitute. Chapter III deviated from the male-dominated performed tragedy with women as prototypes for a male revenger to focus on a daughter, Mariam, and her mother, Alexandra, in a more private, women-focused closet drama by Elizabeth Cary. Through mother-daughter relational tension, Mariam's wifely grief contrasts with Alexandra's maternal anger to uncover

the power in disparity and the uniqueness that makes women powerful and complex. Though the dramatic genres are quite different, surprising parallels exist between Cary's tragedy and Shakespeare's: Hamlet and Mariam, two titular characters, who must choose between grief and action, who struggle against mothers shaming their grief, who look to the opposite sex to explain their emotions, and who die because they choose action over expression.

In *Hamlet* and *The Tragedy of Mariam*, women are used as weapons against other women (consider, for instance, Hamlet using Niobe to insult Gertrude and Alexandra rejecting Mariam in her last moments). When women step out of conventional modes of behavior, they must be checked by male authority, resisted by an opposing force, whether that be misogynistic typecasts like calling women animals or an inversion of maternal love like Gertrude's and Alexandra's. As these early modern women seek freedom in expression, they create tension among their sex, fracturing the feminine mold in dangerous ways—both for men and for themselves. However, in the fracture, there is difference; and in difference, we can appreciate Hecuba's "barefeet" (2.2.443), Gertrude's "incestuous sheets" (1.2.157), Niobe's "all tears" (1.2.149), Mariam's "dutiful though scornful smile" (5.1.52), and Alexandra's "Hate" (1.2.32). After in-depth consideration of grief as manifested in its historical context and in these two case studies of early modern drama, I argue that grief is a stage upon which both genders act genuinely *but in costume*, putting on masculine action in one moment and feminine reflection in the next, exploring the delineated bounds of culture to show that authenticity is what produces true "agency." The humoral body limits, but the changeable feminine character offers difference.

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